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Dissertation

EMERSON AS A LITERARY CRITIC

An Examination of the Formative Influences
on Emerson's Literary Mind and His Theory
and Practice of Literary Criticism

by

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PART I

The Formative Influences on Emerson's Critical Mind

Foreword

In this thesis I shall present a study of the influences which, in Emerson's childhood and early manhood, had a part in forming his judgment on literary matters; his life as a man of letters; his various literary relationships, his theory and practice of criticism, and finally an estimate of his position as critic. I shall divide my thesis into three parts, the first of which will deal with the literary influences of Emerson's youth and maturity, the second with Emerson's theory and practice of criticism, and the third with my opinion of Emerson's place in the field of literary criticism. The first section will be original in synthesis only. My chief sources have been: Cabot, Cooke, and Woodberry, for biographical material; Brooks and Gray for the Transcendental and other perfectionist movements of the background; Harrison and Carpenter for the paragraphs which deal with the Platonic and Eastern influences. The second and third parts of my thesis are, so far as I have been able to discover, original. Michaud has made a brief study of Emerson's Esthetics, but has not related them to his literary theory. Sutcliffe has written a Doctor's dissertation upon Emerson's theories of literary expression which has to do only with rhetoric and stylistics. I have duplicated this only slightly in my section on Stylistics and have come to the information I use here by independent investigation.

A. The Social Background and Literary Environment. Emerson's Life to the Publication of Nature (1836)

1. The Social Background

After the Revolution and still more warmly after the War of 1812 America felt the exhilarating glow of national consciousness. Energy which had realized its power in the struggles for American independence now found vent in the Industrial Revolution which followed in the wake of the cotton gin, the steamboat, the steam railway, the opening of new canals and roadways. With the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 and the acquisition of Florida not long after, our territory was doubled. This was the era of "the winning of the West." "All through this period sounded the axe of the pioneer, clearing the forest about his log cabin, and the rumble of the canvas-covered emigrant wagons over the primitive highways which crossed the Alleghanies or followed the valley of the Mohawk."[1] The ring of this axe and the rumble of these wagons no less than the whirring prosperity of a hundred busy factories reached across the seas and wakened new hope in the depressed of Europe. The bleak summer of 1816 and the tardy spring of 1817 had resulted in drastic conditions in their food supply, and immigration, which had been somewhat sporadic since the admission of Ohio in 1802, now took on increasing proportions. Foreigners poured in as a result of the European romantic wanderlust, political revolution and industrial distress in Germany and England, racial

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1. Beers, An Outline Sketch of American Literature, p. 20

and religious persecution in Russia and later as a result of the potato famine in Ireland.[1] Some of them, largely the Scandinavian and Teutonic peoples, helped in the building up of the civilization of the west and the northwest.[2] Others stayed to become engrossed in the first enthusiasm of the Industrial Revolution. Slums began to appear in the larger cities and in the manufacturing centers around 1814-1820.[3]

Provincialism bit by bit relinquished its hold. Newspapers and mail routes opened long-sealed ways of communication and growing commercial ventures let in a breath of fresh air from the sea. The whole social order was being recast and demanded a new culture. Calvinism was on the wane, although it lingered, protesting its existence in revival movements and zealous establishment of Sunday Schools.[4] Puritan idealism, only incompletely expressed by what Mumford calls "the bloodless Unitarianism of the early nineteenth century which was a sort of humanism without courage,"[5] became the yeast of Transcendentalism, Perfectionism, and lesser forms of individualist sentiment, rising to a final stand against slavery and to the Civil War. Education was wakening from its long theological drowse. Within forty years there were numerous high schools and more than fifty colleges, seminaries, and institutions of higher learning.[6] Colleges added sciences and European literature to their curricula.

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1. Grose, Aliens or Americans? p. 30
2. Bates, American Literature, p. 111
3. Andrews, History of the United States, vol. 3, pp. 130-132
4. Ibid., vol. 2, p. 289
5. Mumford, Golden Day, p. 33
6. Long, History of American Literature, p. 113

Public libraries and art museums were established.[1] In contrast to the grim-faced portraits of the early period and the battle-scenes of the Revolution, an American school of landscape painting was growing up.[2] American sculpture came from the chisels of Greenough, Powers, and Story.[1] Appreciation of music was a growing thing: it founded the Boston Academy of Music in 1833 and the Handel Society at Dartmough College not many years later.[1] Concerts and oratorios became a feature of eastern city life. Even the costumes of the times expressed an exuberance of individuality. 1830 introduced the era of enormous bonnets and leghorn hats massed high with artificial flowers and puffs of ribbon. Gentlemen wore bright blue walking coats, or brown, or green, punctuated with gilt buttons and high collars. Bottle green was the shade for general evening wear until 1850.[3]

Party spirit ran high and pleaded in the "golden-tongued oratory" for which this period is famous. Debates centered around states' rights in the main forum of discussion, the old Senate Chamber made famous by the presence of Clay, Webster, and Calhoun.[4] The rampant idealistic individualism of the period which had threatened slavery from its very beginning was put off temporarily by the Missouri Compromise of 1820 only to break out with greater vehemence in the debates on the Wilmot Proviso and the Kansas and Nebraska bills.[4]

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1. Brownson, A Short History of American Literature, p. 108
2. Bates, American Literature, p. 102
3. Andrews, History of the United States, vol. 3, p. 131
4. Beers, Outline History of American Literature, pp. 109-110

Over all this and through it vibrated a hope in the promise of the land itself - its newness, its vastness, its resource.[1] It struck a spark from materialist and idealist alike. We find its enthusiasm in political speeches, in the poetry of William Cullen Bryant,[2] and in the prose of Washington Irving.[3] It expanded westward and southward. The spirit of adventure and opportunity was in the air. Later Walt Whitman in 1865 was to give it most adequate expression in lines such as we find in his Broadway Pageant:[4]

"I chant America, the mistress, I chant a greater supremacy,
I chant projected a thousand blooming cities yet in time on those groups of sea islands,
My sail-ships and steam-ships threading the archipelagoes,
My stars and stripes fluttering in the wind,
Commerce opening, the sleep of ages having done its work, races reborn, refreshed,
Lives, works resumed - the object I know not - but the old, the Asiatic, renewed as it must be
Commencing from this day, surrounded by the world."

This was the fervor for freedom and vigor of expectancy which found its way beneath social movements into the individual

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1. Mumford, Golden Day, p. 115
2. Richardson, Primer of American Literature, p. 38
3. Ibid., p. 47
4. Page, editor, Chief American Poets, p. 567, lls. 59-65

consciousness and was nurtured by contact with the Romantic Movement across the Atlantic. Everyman of yesterday felt vast possibilities of power stirring his soul and doubted not the promptings were those of genius which if it could find an opportunity for expression, would be of world worth. This was the hope which led the idealist beyond his dismay at the increasing utilitarianism to vision fairer republics of the mind.

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2. The Literary Background of Emerson's Childhood and Early Manhood

But the pen lagged behind the deed. "It was not an age of great books; it was an age of large ideas and expanding prospects."[1] The ground was being made ready for a national literature; here and there were promising signs of what might come,- but it is almost a rule of history that classics are not born in times when a country first wakens to her place as an economic force among the nations. The European romantic movement was finding America, but it touched the political and social life before it reached her literature. Men lived romance and had little time to write it. Those who felt the spirit of the times most keenly were the least articulate. Wordsworth spoke the truth for nearly all great writing when he said that a poem was born of "emotion recollected in tranquillity." So far there had been little tranquillity and little recollection of literary value.

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1. Beers, Outline Sketch of American Literature, p. 91

America was only beginning to acquire the perspective which should allow her to appreciate the picturesqueness of her own past. "The witchcraft in which Cotton Mather believed had a peculiar interest and a high literary value for the unbelieving generation of Hawthorne; and the manners and customs of Revolutionary days acquired in half a century some of the charm of the obsolete."[1] So too were the perils and wild freedom of the frontiersmen, the stories which clustered about Daniel Boone, and the river-life of the Ohio boatmen to pass into the charmed realm of literary material. Historic associations, a wealth of legend and poetry were the old world's birthright; America had from the beginning been handicapped by the crude newness of her youth, by the practical and moral trends into which her thought had been forced.

But, the way was being made for a renaissance. For one thing the reading public was growing. New fortunes made in the industrial world permitted more time for leisure. Consequently there was an increase in the number and circulation of periodicals and books which made it possible at last for an author to live by his pen[1] even though the lack of an international copyright law and the stealing of English current literature by American publishers kept this living a meagre one.

England still served as model for the best American literature. Contemporary English oratory with its heavy stateliness rounded the periods of men like Edward Everett and

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1. Brownson, A Short History of American Literature, p. 110

Channing,- while an agressively American temperament expressed itself in the Fourth of July oration, a blend of "patriotic bombast and cheap self-glorification."[1] English reviewers gave scorn and occasional patronizing praise to American books; American authors replied with absurdly vehement denials, with ineffectual satire and empty boasts. The early nineteenth century was a period of literary antagonism between the two countries.[2] America resolved fiercely to confound foreign critics with a literature of her own, but that literature was not forthcoming. The strain of effort is seen in pieces like Barlow's Columbiad of 1807. Reviewers demanded rapid composition, treatment of American subjects, and "sustained effort" which, Cairns remarks, probably came from the feeling that only writings on a grand scale could adequately represent a great country.[3] An author was praised for being able to compose a poem in a single sitting.[3] Subjects might become national; style and tone remained imitative. Yet even this period of anxious apprenticeship had its value. From this ferment of literary zeal were to come Cooper, Bryant, Irving, Poe, and Emerson.

Beers gives the following quotation from S. G. Goodrich's Recollections. (Goodrich had settled as a bookseller in Hartford in 1818.)

"About this time (about 1829) I began to think of trying

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1. Brownson, A Short History of American Literature, p. 78
2. Cairns, History of American Literature, p. 158
3. Ibid., p. 159

> to bring out original American works.....The general impression was that we had not, and could not have, a literature. It was the precise point at which Sidney Smith had uttered that bitter taunt in the Edinburgh Review: 'Who reads an American book?'.....It was positively injurious to the commercial credit of a bookseller to undertake American works."[1]

New York was the center for the literature produced earliest in the century. It was the chief commercial center of the country; the largest publishing houses were founded there and it was during this period that New York newspapers won the reputation they still maintain.[2] Here it was the James Fenimore Cooper, William Cullen Bryant, and Fitz-Greene Halleck came to form around the person of Washington Irving the Knickerbocker School. Irving has been called "the first ambassador of letters from the New World to the Old;" certain it is that the recognition he won in both countries went far to allay the bitterness which the War of 1812 had reawakened between the United States and England. Cooper likewise won laurels abroad with his highly romanticized, pseudo-primitive Leatherstocking. Bryant came to be called "The Father of American Song."[3] The American lakes, mountains, birds, and wild flowers of his poetry appear in refreshing contrast to the imported larks, nightingales, and English primroses of earlier verse. Amusingly enough the critics of the period bestowed laurels upon these three in terms which show how long former attitudes still lingered; Cooper was

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1. Beers, Outline Sketch of American Literature, p. 92
2. Cairns, History of American Literature, pp. 159-160
3. Quoted in Biographical Sketch, Chief American Poets, Page, editor, p. 658

"the American Scott;" Bryant, "the American Wordsworth;" Irving, "the American Addison." In the south, Edgar Allen Poe won recognition during his brief life as a poetic genius, a literary critic, and a creator of the American short story.

The New England group of this period lagged somewhat behind their contemporaries. In the Jeffersonian administration New England suffered an economic and political eclipse.[1] The more energetic of her population emigrated to the west, and, with so much young blood gone, the Atlantic states remained bound by conservatism - in politics, religion, and in business self-interest.[2]

The successors to the Hartford wits of the previous generation poured forth voluminously a literature of sentimentality and pious didacticism. Lydia Huntley Sigourney, "the American Mrs. Hemans", with her Olive-Buds and Whisper to a Bride is typical.[3] James Gates Percival was writing poetry which has been well forgotten. In Connecticut Sarah Wentworth Norton, Hannah F. Gould, and Lydia Maria Child were writing and being read.[3] At the same time, however, Longfellow was publishing his first book of poems, Voices of the Night, in 1839[4] and sending essays to the North American Review.[4]

At Boston the Anthology Club was founded in 1803 by Emerson's father, the Reverend William Emerson, and its publication, The Monthly Anthology, was the most important maga-

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1. Chapman, Emerson and Other Essays, p. 6
2. Ibid., p. 7
3. Cairns, History of American Literature, pp. 197-199
4. Long, History of American Literature, p. 285

zine of the Atlantic states before 1815.[1] Among its famous contributors are the names of William Ellery Channing, Richard Henry Dana, George Ticknor, and Edward Everett.[2] The North American Review began in Boston in 1815 with William Tudor as editor and is the most important review of Emerson's young manhood.

It goes almost without saying that there was little in the way of literary criticism. There had been little literature to call forth any serious efforts in that direction. Saintsbury calls George Ticknor, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and Emerson our first critics.[3] He might well have added the name of Edgar Allan Poe.

Ticknor had gathered material from a prolonged sojourn in Europe. He was Smith Professor of Modern Language and Belles Lettres in Harvard when Emerson studied there.[3] His History of Spanish Literature is still authoritative. Saintsbury remarks that his was a "hierophantic, initiating, inoculating office."[4] No one who is susceptible to literature, but more or less ignorant of it reads Longfellow but he must unconsciously imbibe something of literature itself.[4]

Besides Emerson the only literary criticism of this early period which seems worthy of the name to Norman Foerster was Poe's.[5] He it was who made it known that there were two types of provincialism. The old had been a slavish imitation

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1. Cambridge History of American Literature, p. 162
2. Ibid., p. 164
3. Saintsbury, History of Criticism, vol. 3, appendix II, p. 632
4. Ibid., p. 633
5. Foerster, American Criticism, p. 1 et seq.

of English models which had carried with it at least a recognition of worth; the new was a false patriotic sense of America's importance.[1] He entered the lists to wage warfare on these two types of provincialism; instead of these idols he desired to set up the ideal of adherence to principles of art, discoverable by philosophical analysis.[1] Some of his famous principles were these: The end of art is pleasure, not truth;[2] the greatest amount of beauty is to be obtained from works which possess unity of effect and economy of materials;[3] the poetic principle is the Human Aspiration for Supernal Beauty[4] - there is no such thing as a passionate poem.

With Emerson's criticism this thesis is chiefly concerned. Let us first, however, look briefly at his life and see what influences there, literary and otherwise, moulded his thought.

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1. Foerster, American Criticism, p. 1 et seq.
2. Ibid., p. 8
3. Ibid., p. 21
4. Ibid., p. 30

3. Emerson's Life (1803-1836)

Ralph Waldo Emerson was the second in the line of five sons who were born to William Emerson, minister of the Boston First Church (Unitarian), and Ruth Haskins, his wife. The family influence is one of more than usual importance in this case. John Burroughs says,

> "It is significant and is indeed the hidden seed or root out of which comes the explanation of much, if not the main part of his life and writings, that Emerson comes of a long line of clergymen; that the blood in his veins has been teaching, and preaching, and thinking, and growing austere, these many generations.....Emerson's culture is radical and antenatal."[1]

A "long line of clergymen" there certainly was - eight generations of them on the side of his father, Puritans all. Cooke quotes Lemuel Shattuck's History of Concord as having traced Emerson's ancestry back to the beginnings of the thirteenth century when one of the English barons who secured Magna Charta of King John was Lord Mayor of Bulkeley in the county of Chester.[2] This was Robert Bulkeley, and Shattuck gives the names of his descendants down to Edward Bulkeley, D.D., rector at Woodhill, Bedfordshire, in the last quarter of the sixteenth century. This worthy, who wrote a supplement to Foxes' Book of Martyrs, seems to have been the first minister of the family. Peter Bulkeley, who came to Concord, was an earnest, eloquent preacher and had the reputation of being one of the best scholars among the early colonists. Cotton Mather maintains that he had "a competently good stroke at Latin poetry."

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1. Burroughs, Birds and Poets, p. 189
2. Cooke, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 2

In the Ann Hutchinson controversy Bulkeley wrote a volume of controversial theology which Cooke declares to be "strong reasoning, sound common sense, and earnest piety."[1] Ralph's grandfather was minister in Concord at the opening of the Revolution and is said to have urged the Minute Men to stand ground near his parsonage.[2]

William Emerson, his son and Ralph's father, was one of the race of orator-preachers in Channing's day. Woodberry quotes him as "fluent, clear, and polished in discourse, of social habits and literary tastes,.....editor of The Monthly Anthology, suggester and supporter of the first learned societies and libraries of the city."[3] He was an active member of the Massachusetts Historical Society, and the Physiological Society. In 1804 he undertook his chief literary enterprise, The Monthly Anthology.[4] With sixteen friends he formed the Anthology Club which met once a week to project and discuss articles for the Anthology[4] which was, according to Oliver Wendell Holmes, "the literary precursor of the North American Review, and the theological herald of the Christian Examiner."[5] Although it seemed to mingle extracts and original contributions, theology and medicine, with all kinds of literary chips and shavings, although it talked about the "London Reviewers" with a sort of provincial deference,[5] it constitutes, in Cabot's mind,

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1. Cooke, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 5
2. Page, Chief American Poets (biographical sketches), p. 663
3. Woodberry, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 5
4. Cabot, Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, vol. 1, pp. 23-24
5. Holmes, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 29

one of the most lasting and honorable monuments of the taste and literature of the period.[1] The magazine lasted from 1804 to 1811, the year of William Emerson's death,[2] and issued ten octavo volumes from the press.[1]

Nor did the Reverend William Emerson's literary tastes exhaust themselves in this enterprise. The Anthology Club had started a collection of books at his suggestion which grew into the Boston Athenaeum Library.[3] At Harvard, too, he had started a public library to which he gave his service as librarian.[3] When a new meeting house was built in Chauncey Place he also persuaded the church to form a theological library in the vestry.[3]

Ruth Haskins, Emerson's mother, who through her long married life was known as Madame Emerson,[4] was the tenth of the sixteen children in the family of John Haskins and his wife Hannah Upham of Boston.[5] Mr. Haskins was a staunch supporter of the Episcopal Church and in 1785 he was appointed one of a committee of seven to report upon changes in the Prayer Book which one Mr. James Freeman, the young lay pastor, deemed desirable.[6] He took resolute ground against any changes which Freeman wished to make in statements teaching or implying the Trinity and filled sixteen pages of letter paper with a clearly written, forcible argument in support of this doctrine.[7]

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1. Cabot, Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, vol. 1, p. 24
2. Holmes, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 33
3. Cabot, Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, vol. 1, p. 25
4. Ibid., p. 7
5. Haskins, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 1
6. Ibid., p. 17
7. Ibid., p. 18

People were in the habit of seeking his advice and many a pithy saying attributed to him was repeated for more than a generation after his death.[1]

His daughter Ruth had the advantage of the best school opportunities of the day. A section from her diary shows the clear meditative cast of her mind:

Boston, April 20, 1795

> "Previous to the above date, I have had many thoughts respecting the advantages that might arise from the constant practice of writing down minutely the dealings of God toward me every evening, or at least once a week. Viewing this to be a good means to obtain the knowledge of myself, and to observe if I make progress in the Christian and divine life, or grow in the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures. I desire now in a better strength than my own to resolve that from this date - April 20, 1795 - I will, as God shall enable me, from time to time carefully notice all his providences towards my friends or myself, whether prosperous or adverse, and conscientiously note down whatever appears to be for the glory of God or the good of my own soul. Most mighty God, assist me now to look up to thee by prayer for thy blessing on these feeble endeavors to promote and strengthen vital piety and true religion in my own immortal soul!"

The entries in her diary continue at more or less frequent intervals until May, 1799.[2] Her cousin, David Haskins, says of her, "She lived a pure, spiritual life. I believe her heaven began on earth. She was much beloved by her husband's parish."[3] And again, "She was a good disciplinarian, firm and decided in the government of her children."[3] She brought up her five little boys with native serenity "wisely and well" after their

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1. Haskins, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 21
2. Ibid., p. 43
3. Ibid., pp. 63-64

father's death in 1811, when Ralph was eight years old.[1] Family pride never failed the Emersons in their extreme poverty nor daunted their conviction that the boys should be well educated[2]- presumably for the ministry.

Sanborn gives a vivid description of the Boston of Emerson's time in Scribner's Monthly (Feb., 1879)[3]:

> "He breathed in its atmosphere and its traditions as a boy, while he drove his mother's cow to pasture along what are now the finest streets. He learned his first lessons of life in its schools and churches; listened to Webster and Story in its courts, to Josiah Quincy and Harrison Gray Otis in its town-meetings at Faneuil Hall; heard sermons in the Old South Meeting-house."

Ralph Waldo's childhood is nowhere recorded in any degree of fulness. Dr. William Henry Furness, a school- and play-mate who knew him from his earliest days, remembers him as "a spiritual-looking boy in blue nankeen",[4] grave though not shy with visitors,[5] having regular boy-games with his brothers, and writing verses for all their special occasions.[4] Mr. Haskins speaks of Waldo's little pieces spoken at the clerical teas held on Sunday afternoons at the Emerson home and elsewhere:- "You'd scarce expect one of my age;" "Franklin one night stopped at a public inn;" and a part of the Dialogue between Brutus and Cassius.[6] He comments, as other contemporaries have done, on the little boy's amazing memory. Dr.

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1. Biographical sketch by Edward W. Emerson in Nature, p. 14
2. Woodberry, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 3
3. Quoted in Cooke, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 19
4. Cabot, Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, vol. 1, p. 10
5. Garnett, Introduction to Representative Men, p. 12
6. Haskins, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 56

Furness remarks upon his early literary bent:

> "I can as little remember when he was not literary in his pursuits as when I first made his acquaintance. Whether in Boston or at Concord, at school or in the country store, in their home attic or in their grandfather's barn, the true sport of these boys was literature. They were bred on it. They read, of course, good authors and improving works; but what most attracted them was the form of good writing. The first awakening of their minds was to a perception of rhetoric and to the sonorousness of declamatory poetry and to the poise of prose.....They all heard attentively many sermons, and it is true that the church was an early, long-continuing, and efficient school of literary expression in the community, and boyhood shared in this benefit. .....In this happy environment he early developed a spontaneous literary faculty."[1]

The father as long as he lived never neglected hearing the boys' lessons. Ralph's schooling had begun before he was three, at which mature age his father's diary notes that "Ralph does not read very well yet."[2] Cabot quotes from a letter which the minister sends his wife during a short absence from home:

> "William (aged five) will recite to you as he does to me, if you have leisure to hear him, a sentence of English grammar before breakfast,- though I think, if only one can be attended to, Ralph (aged three) should be that one."

Dr. Edward Emerson, speaking of his father's early reading many years later, says that William Emerson's library held but a few books of any literary value,[3] although he was in his day a leading man of letters in Boston. Nearly all it contained were eighteenth century doctrinal treatises. But his

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1. Cabot, Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, vol. 1, p. 41
2. Quoted in Woodberry, Ralph Waldo Emerson, pp. 10-11
3. Emerson, Edward, Addresses before Free Religious Association, p.45

sons "took to books as ducks to water and - there being then no children's books - eagerly seized on all works, especially poetry: Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, Collins, and Young. Byron and Scott came first in time for their joyful reading and Wordsworth for hours of contemplation. When they had nothing to read, they wrote, and furnished admiring audiences to each other."[1]

Mary Moody Emerson, the father's sister, who contributed articles to the Monthly Anthology,[2] was a constant visitor at the Emerson household. She cheered the boys with tales of heroic endeavor in those poverty-stricken days after the father's death when food was often scarce and Ralph and his elder brother William shared one great coat between them.[3] The tale is told that Ralph once took the first volume of a novel from a nearby circulating library and paid six cents for the use of it. His aunt rebuked him for spending the money for such a purpose when it was so hard for his mother to get the money. The little boy's conscience was so touched that he returned the book without ever finishing it.[4]

Mary Moody Emerson was a strange, austere, lonely, dark Sybilline creature of brilliant mind and compelling force of character.[5] Emerson's later diaries are full of the influence which she had over the nephews for whom she had high aspirations.

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1. Emerson, Edward, Addresses before Free Religious Association, p. 45
2. Cabot, Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, vol. 1, p. 26
3. Garnett, Introduction to Representative Men, p. 12
4. Cooke, Ralph Waldo Emerson, pp. 17-18
5. Mary Moody Emerson by Ralph Waldo Emerson in Biographical Sketches

In the journal of 1857 he remembers the prayers which his Aunt Mary had written for the oldest brother William to read aloud at the family morning prayer meetings, and realizes how, when years after he came to write sermons for his church, the "prophetic and apocalyptic phrases" which she had used in those same prayers, rang in his ears. Later when at Harvard he copied whole extracts of her letters to him and of his replies into the journals. She was a constant irritant to his independence. The clear logic of her argument cut intensely into any too hazy generalizations of his. For his doubting she had lines which his own ringing sentences of Self Reliance were to match:

> "Scorn trifles, lift your aims, do what you are afraid to do. Sublimity of character must come from sublimity of motive."[1]

Her love for Nature kindled his own appreciation for it. Charles Emerson, the youngest nephew and her favorite, wrote of her, "As by seeing a high tragedy, reading a true poem, ...so by society with her one's mind is electrified and purged."

Her religion was a stern exaltation in solitude which ideally had no compromise with the Calvinism she exhorted her friends to. Her whole life was "devoted to find some new truth" which should link her "closer to God."[2] Her Puritan suppression of any suggestion of levity weighed upon Emerson's natural seriousness with the result that his early diaries are full of

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1. Emerson, R. W., Mary Moody Emerson
2. Ibid., quoted from Miss Emerson's diary

self-reproach at any trait of "youthful silliness,"[1] and at twenty years of age he laments his "propensity to laugh, or rather snicker" which makes him ill at ease among men.[2]

Moncure D. Conway classifies Aunt Mary as one of the Three Fates who presided over Emerson's early life, the other two being Emerson's mother and Sarah Bradford, William Emerson's ward and Mary Moody's intimate friend.[3]

Sarah Bradford, who later became Mrs. Samuel Ripley, had the distinction of being one of the few woman scholars of the day. She read Greek in a time when it is likely that no other woman in her vicinity had any desire to learn the language. After her marriage she fitted boys for college in Greek and Latin, became one of the best Greek scholars in the country, and read till her latest years Homer, the tragedians, and Plato. She added to these pursuits knowledge of mathematics, natural philosophy, psychology, theology, ancient and modern literature, and a keen curiosity in the development of science.[4] She took a keen interest in her friend's nephews and particularly in Waldo. Once when he was ill, she wrote to him: "You love to trifle in rhyme a little now and then. Why will you not complete this versification of the fifth bucolic?" sending him a translation of Virgil. "You will answer two ends, or as the old proverb goes, kill two birds with one stone,- improve in your Latin, as well as indulge a taste for poetry. Why can't you write me a

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1. Journal, May 13, 1822
2. Journal, April 19, 1824
3. Conway, Ralph Waldo Emerson, chap. 3, p. 41
4. Emerson, Biographical Sketches, Sarah Bradford Ripley

letter in Latin? But Greek is your favorite language. Epistola in lingua Graeca would be still better. All the honour will be on my part to correspond with a young gentleman in Greek...."[1] In response to this letter he returned a poetic version of the fifth bucolic, II. 19-35:

May 6, 1814

"Mop. Turn now, O youth! from your long speech away;
The bower we've reached, recluse from sunny ray.
The nymphs with pomp have mourned for Daphnis dead;
The hazels witnessed, and the rivers fled.
The wretched mother clasped her lifeless child,
And gods and stars invoked in accents wild.
Daphnis! the cows are not now led to streams
Where the bright sun upon the water gleams;
Neither do herds the cooling river drink,
Nor crop the grass upon the verdant brink.
O Daphnis! both the mountains and the woods,
The Punic lions, and the raging floods,
All mourn for thee,- for thee who first did hold
In chariot-reins the spotted tiger bold.
Daphnis the bacchanalian chorus led,
He placed himself at the mad dancers' head.
'Twas Daphnis who, with beauteous fingers, wove
The stems of leaves he gathered from the grove.
As the great beauty of a tree is seen
From vines intwining round its pleasant green,
As vines themselves in grapes their beauty find,
As the fair bull of all the lowing kind,
As standing corn doth grace the verdant fields,
So to thy beauty every rival yields."

In 1813 we find Emerson at Latin School where the headmaster was Mr. Benjamin Apthorp Gould.[2] Judge Loring, a classmate, writes of his work there: "He was always a good scholar because honestly studious, but not eminent. His compositions were graceful and correct; this made their quality."[3] His favorite pieces for declamation in those days were from the

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1. Cooke, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 18
2. Cabot, Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, vol. 1, p. 42
3. Ibid., pp. 42-43

"Pleasures of Hope" and "Warsaw's Last Champion."[1] Toward the end of his career at Latin School he more than once delivered original poems on exhibition days and some of his themes were treasured by Mr. Gould for the eyes of the school-committee.[2]

He supplemented his formal school training by lessons in writing in a private class kept by a Mr. Webb, master of one of the public grammar schools. It was during this period that Ralph wrote some verses on the naval victories of the War of 1812 and a verse romance called Fortus which his friend Dr. Furness illustrated and which is now in the possession of the Reverend Daniel Noyes at Byfield.[1]

Ralph's ease in verse making was indeed a matter of modest family pride - often his letters passed with little excuse from verse to prose.[3] In February 24, 1815, he writes to his brother William at college on the peace declaration which followed the War of 1812:

Concord

My dear Brother,-

What a change has taken place since I saw you last, and how happy is the change! But a little while since and the cry of war was heard in every place, but now

Fair Peace triumphant blooms on golden wings,
And War no more of all his Victories sings.

When the news reached this place a smile was on every face and joy in every heart. On the 22d instant the steeple of the court-house here was illuminated and appeared very brilliant from this house. When I came

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1. Cabot, Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, vol. 1, pp. 42-43
2. Ibid., p. 44
3. Ibid., p. 45

> to see you, you did not pack up your Cicero's Orations in the bundle, and I should like to have you send it the first opportunity in your bundle of clothes. To-day I get through the Incredibilibus Collectanea.
>
> And now, dear William, with a rhyme
> I'll close,
> For you are tired, I may well
> suppose.
> Besides, we soon shall hear the
> nightly bell
> For prayers,- so now farewell.
>
> Yours affectionately,
>
> Ralph

In 1817 Emerson attained the long-anticipated goal of Harvard College where his meagre fortune was reinforced by a position as President's freshman or messenger to announce regulations to the students. This gave him his lodging, and a position as waiter at Commons gave him three-fourths of his board.[1]

Harvard was in its manner of instruction at that time more like a boys' preparatory school of today.[2] There were almost daily recitations from each member of a class and the objective seemed to be "to give and receive a certain dose of learning without much thought on either side of there being anything of intrinsic interest in it."[2] The disciplinary measures savored of preparatory school as well. Josiah Quincy, a classmate of Emerson's, gives this account:

> "Some students entered at twelve years of age, though fifteen was nearer the average among those whose parents were well off. We were treated as boys and not without reason. The law declared that we must

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1. Garnett, Introduction to Representative Men, p. 19
2. Cabot, Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, vol. 1, p. 55

> not go to Boston without permission or pass a night away from Cambridge without a special license from the authorities. Moreover, in the early part of 1819 the president, in behalf of the corporation, promulgated a statute to the effect that a fine of ten dollars would be exacted from every student who was caught at the theatre, while five dollars must be paid by any one who attended a party in Boston. But it is probable that the corporation made no attempt to carry out the system of espionage which their savage edict seemed to necessitate. We certainly used to go to the theatre and to parties with some freedom and seldom got into difficulty from doing so."[1]

He gives also a realistic account of the rooming conditions:

> "The student's apartments of my day were not so attractive that one would wish to linger in them. I cannot remember a single room which had carpet, curtain, or any pretense of ornament. In a few of them were hung some very poor prints, representing the four seasons, emblematical representations of the countries of Europe, and imaginative devices of a similar nature. Our light came from dipped candles with very broad bases gradually narrowing to the top. These required the constant use of snuffers,- a circumstance which hindered application to an extent that in these days of kerosene and gas can scarcely be appreciated."[2]

Emerson was not a brilliant student; in most respects a very ordinary one. He felt, perhaps, that for him to gain power of self-expression was more important than to master philosophy or to receive a scientific training. He was nearly brought into disgrace his first year in college by his backwardness in mathematics.[3] Mere facts which did not come to him through his own immediate experience seemed to have no appeal for him. He met them perfunctorily, with his characteristic

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1. Quincy, Figures of the Past, pp. 22-23
2. Ibid., p. 36
3. Garnett, Introduction to Representative Men, p. 20

aloofness, and apparently lived in a world very remote from their intrusion.

Some few exceptions there were to the usual student-teacher classroom relationships of the day. There were the classes with George Ticknor, Professor of Modern Languages, and with Edward Everett, Professor of Greek, both of whom tried to bring back from Europe some of the methods of university instruction there, and some of the spirit of the Romantic Movement.[1] From these men Emerson took long notes and read much in the trends of thought they suggested. Especially did he fall under the spell of Everett's famous magnetism and his classroom quotations from Homer, Milton, and Byron.[2] He and his brother William used to haunt the forums and churches where the orator was to appear, and went away after his address richly satisfied. They spoke of him to one another as "The Idol." Emerson was no doubt thinking of himself and his brother when he wrote in his journal of September, 1842:

> "This eminently beautiful person (Everett) was followed like an Apollo from church to church, wherever the fame that he would preach led, by all the most cultivated and intelligent youths with grateful admiration. His appearance in any pulpit lighted up all countenances with delight. The smallest anecdote of behaviour or conversation was eagerly caught and repeated, and every young scholar could repeat brilliant sentences from his sermons with mimicry good or bad of his voice.....The church was dismissed, but the bright image of that eloquent form followed the boy home to his bedchamber, and not a sentence was written in a theme, not a declamation attempted in the College Chapel, but showed the omnipresence of his genius to the youthful heads.

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1. Cabot, Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, vol. 1, p. 55
2. Ibid., p. 56

> He thus raised the standard of taste in writing and speaking in New England."

In another journal of June 10, 1838, Emerson says:

> "Everett has put more stories, sentences, verses, names in amber for me than any other person."

In college diaries we find long passages prefaced by "Mr. Everett says....." He wrote a prize essay on Socrates, and at the end of his senior year a long letter to Plato appears also in his diary.

Emerson's nature found further chance of expression in Levi Frisbies' classes of Moral Philosophy and he labored with long interest over Edward Tyrrel Channing's exercises in English Composition.[1] Frequent drafts for themes and suggestions for subjects are found in his journals of this period.

The rest of his college education he found for the most part outside the classroom, in the college library. Shakespeare he loved and many of the early English dramatists. Aristotle, Socrates, Wordsworth, Chaucer, De Stael, Pascal, Thomas A Kempis, Goethe, Coleridge, Marcus Aurelius, and passages from Eastern Scriptures are much quoted in the journals of his junior and senior years. Montaigne seems to have been a later enthusiasm.

As for his social life in college after classroom and working hours, it did not include a large group of intimates. Emerson's boyhood aloofness and gravity deepened as he grew into manhood. He was not one who sought many friendships, but by

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1. Cabot, Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, vol. 1, p. 56

degrees some of the more scholarly members of the class began to find him good company, knowing much less than they might have wished about the textbooks common to all of them, but far more than most of them about literature, and, what is more, they found him a thoughtful companion in discussion.[1] He was the leading spirit in a small book club which was organized to purchase English Reviews, the North American Review (just coming into prominence then), and literature of the day which the college library did not contain.[2] The member having the most money at the time bought a desired book, which was then to be read aloud and discussed at club meetings.[2] This group finally called themselves the Pythologian Society. From the secretary's reports in Emerson's journals it seems to have grown into a medium for philosophical discussion and debate rather than continuing as a book club. Perhaps an evolution from the times when no one had money to buy a new book.

He had some ability in declamation which had been encouraged in Latin School. He won a second Boylston prize, Josiah Quincy coming off with a first. Quincy remarks jocosely:

> "I was of course much pleased with the award of this intelligent committee; and should have been still more gratified had they mentioned that the man who was to be the most original and influential writer born in America was my unsuccessful competitor."[3]

In his junior year he wrote an essay on the Character of Socrates for which he gained a Bowdoin prize, and a second prize in his

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1. Cabot, Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, vol. 1, p. 59
2. Ibid., p. 60
3. Quincy, Figures of the Past, p. 17

senior year for a paper on The Present State of Ethical Philosophy.[1] He was always turning off squibs on college affairs and supplying songs for his classmates' festal occasions.[2]

Graduation came for Emerson in 1821. He held the doubtful distinction of class poet, after seven others had refused the honor, and, Commencement over, passed down the elm-shaded avenue out of the college gates, a grave, dignified young Senior little presaging to the majority of his acquaintances the popular individualist philosopher he was to be.

For two years after his graduation, Waldo taught in the young ladies' school which his brother William had opened in Federal Street.[3] This seemed to be a necessary interval before he might take up the studies in Divinity which it now seemed to him were to prepare him for his life's work..... since there were younger brothers who were to be helped through college.[3] For him these were among the unhappiest, most discontented years of his life. At the time they seemed to him sheer waste; he had little liking for his task as instructor and felt that he performed it poorly. In a speech made to some of his former pupils many years later he reveals his attitude:[3]

> "My teaching was partial and external. I was at the very time already writing every night in my chamber, my first thoughts on morals and the beautiful laws of compensation and of individual genius which to observe and illustrate have given sweetness to many years of my life.....I am afraid

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1. Cooke, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 21
2. Cabot, Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, vol. 1, p. 60
3. Cooke, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 23

> no hint of this ever came into the school, when we clung to the safe and cold details of languages, geography, arithmetic, and chemistry. Now I believe that each should serve the other by his or her strength, not by their weakness; and that, if I could have had one hour of deep thought at that time, I could have engaged you in thoughts that would have given reality and depth and joy to the school, and raised all the details to the highest pleasure and nobleness."

Mr. Cabot adds that the memory of one of his pupils does not confirm Emerson's opinion that he was unsuccessful as a teacher. "She remembers him as entirely satisfactory to their parents and much beloved and respected in the school; also that the reading of poetry was one of the regular exercises."[1]

Nevertheless - young Emerson was far from happy. Neither his books nor his journals furnished adequate solace. He writes to John B. Hill, a Harvard classmate of his:

> Boston, March 12, 1822
> "Won't you sit down immediately and entertain your poor brother of the School Militant with some account of yourself and your region? Write sentiment, geography, statistics, Latin, anything in short in the wide world but mathematics. For I am truly ambitious of writing letters and burn to say that I correspond with the revered, the wise, the honorable members of the - Conventicle - if nothing else."[2]

Other letters to the same classmate show what use he made of his leisure, and give us some interesting sidelights on his view of the literature of the time:

> "I think, Mr. Hill, we rather improve in the book line. Washington Irving is just about to publish a book called Bracebridge Hall".....the North American Review grows better and travels

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1. Cabot, Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 71
2. Ibid., p. 86

farther, and though we are inundated with silly poetry, we improve....."[1]

July 3, 1822

"We citizens venture to deny the 'Pirate' a little of the reverence we have accorded to his predecessors, and are divided upon the subject of the 'Spy'; many preferring it to the last book, which opinion I personally spurn.....Our economical citizens have been quite dead to 'Bracebridge Hall' since its price was known. I have neither read nor seen a single individual who has read it. The extracts I have met with have disappointed me much, as he has left his fine 'Sketch-Book' style for the deplorable Dutch of 'Knickerbocker' which to me is very tedious....."[2]

Boston, November 12, 1822

"There is a class of beings which I very often wish existed on earth - Immortal Professors, who should read all that is written, and at the end of each century should publicly burn all the superfluous pages in the world.....If our Immortal Professors were appointed today, we should rapidly find that the literary world was but a Don Quixote's library."[3]

February 27, 1823

"The 'Pioneers' I like very much. The last North American Review is full of wit and literature, of which the Idol wrote six articles."[4]

June 19, 1823

"In writing, as in all things else, I follow my caprice, and my pen has played me many tricks lately in taking a holiday somewhat longer than is my wont, and sore vs. my will; for if my scribbling humor fails to come upon me, I am as uneasy as a cow unmilked."[5]

On Sunday, April 24, 1824, Emerson writes in his journal:

"I am beginning my professional studies. In a month I shall be legally a man; and I deliberately dedicate my time, my talents, and my hopes to the church."

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1. Cabot, Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 90
2. Ibid., p. 90
3. Ibid., p. 93
4. Ibid., p. 96
5. Ibid., pp. 97-98

There follows the famous passage of self-analysis in which he weighs his talents in the balance; he finds a love for poetry and eloquence in himself, but a disproportionate amount of reasoning power. He comforts himself that the highest species of reasoning upon divine subjects is rather "the fruit of a sort of moral imagination than of the reasoning machines."[1] Theology as such was always beyond his powers of concentration.

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1. Cooke, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 24

B. The Influences on Emerson's Thought

1. The Religious Influence

Religion at this time of Emerson's development was, as we might expect, in a state of transition.

Taken purely as a matter of psychology the intense fervor of Puritanism which inspired the early colonists could not last indefinitely. Through the greater part of the eighteenth century, political and commercial affairs in the region around Boston occupied the attention of the greater number of people, preventing them from any exclusive absorption in religion.[1] Echoes of eighteenth century English radicalism and Methodism began to penetrate to the colonies. Arminianism appeared in Massachusetts[2] with its protest against the Calvinistic doctrine of Predestination, and its idea that a man could prevent or aid by his attitude the operation of Divine Grace.[3] Not long afterwards came Arianism with its assertion that Christ was not of the same essence as God, the Father, but was the first and highest of His creatures.[4] Then on the other side arrived Jonathan Edwards in 1731 with his eloquent revival sermons to split the Congregational religious factions nicely in half. His converts were called New Calvinists, who went on to develop the orthodox contribution of American theology to the age of Reason. On the other hand the Liberal School were startled into comparative solidarity by the excesses of Calvin-

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1. Goddard, Studies in New England Transcendentalism, p. 19
2. Ibid., p. 20
3. New International Encyclopedia, vol. 2, p. 146
4. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 114

istic revivals, and called themselves Unitarians,[1] although they had very little direct connection with English Unitarianism organized by Joseph Priestly. The name covered rather the whole early movement of release from New England religious tradition.[2] Typical of the critical age of Reason in which it received its impetus, it was in its beginnings more negatively Calvinistic than positively any creed, and heavy with rationalism. Its leaders, Henry Ware, William Ellery Channing, and later Theodore Parker, had some knowledge of the creeds which we know as Unitarianism, - that God is a single undivided personality and the core of all religion is a communion of the Human Soul with God and the life of God within the spirit of man; that Religion is thus an experience of the inner life to which all forms and creeds are of secondary importance; that the church and Bible are outer expressions of inner reality, neither of which have any authority over the human mind; that Jesus was an example of manhood in fullest communion with God, and therefore a human life through whom we can study an ideal expression of God's spirit.[3] But to the followers to whom their eloquence and earnestness appealed, Unitarianism was first of all a revolt from religious restriction - and secondarily free religious life for the Spirit, together with a new kind of intolerance - for Calvinism. It was natural that out of such an attitude should grow up forms which, once the first impetuosity of freedom had lost its significance

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1. Goddard, Studies in New England Transcendentalism, p. 21
2. Cabot, Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, vol. 1, p. 22
3. New International Encyclopedia, vol. 22, p. 657

through several generations of followers, grew as irksome and well nigh as meaningless as the old precisions of orthodoxy.

In 1805 Henry Ware, Unitarian minister, had been made Professor of Theology at Harvard, and a great wave of influential liberalism had gone out from his classes.[1] Edward Everett graduated from Harvard in these days as did Joseph Stevens Buckminster, a prominent Boston preacher in the time of Emerson.

In 1819, Dr. William E. Channing preached his famous Baltimore Sermon which contrasted Unitarianism with Calvinism clearly, and destructively for the latter. The sermon swept the country in editorials and pamphlets. Within a year one hundred and fifty New England Congregational Churches had declared themselves Unitarian, and all the churches in Boston with the exception of one.[2]

To come more closely to Concord Unitarianism - Emerson's father was a Unitarian minister of decidedly liberal views.[3] An influence for liberalism in that time was a magazine called The Monthly Anthology which had been started by a young Harvard graduate, probably fired with enthusiasm for Henry Ware, dedicated to the service of literature and general culture, and using a good many of its columns for purposes of open theological discussions. When this original editor was ready to give the paper up after a year's publication, as we have seen, William Emerson took it over and with a group of friends continued it

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1. Allen, Liberal Movement in Theology, p. 75
2. New International Encyclopedia, vol. 22, p. 657
3. Goddard, Studies in New England Transcendentalism, p. 23

through ten volumes.[1]

Waldo Emerson's Aunt Mary had the reputation for wishing everyone to be a Calvinist but herself,[1] but her philosophy was certainly too liberal for the effectiveness of her influence as an upholder of orthodoxy. We may be sure that under her guidance her nephew did not move back into orthodox Puritanism.

Dr. Ripley was the Concord shepherd of the orthodox, but dearly as Emerson and most of his congregation loved the old man, the young people and many of the older had had little real sympathy with his religious beliefs.

In college Emerson had idolized Edward Everett who had graduated from Harvard in the days of Henry Ware's professorship there. From his natural interest in morality and ethics as well as his slowly forming conviction that he was destined for the ministry, he must have been keenly interested in the Baltimore Sermon preached while he was a Junior at Harvard. Mentions of admiration for Channing are scattered throughout his college journals. In his senior year we find Emerson finally dedicating himself, in a journal entry of self analysis,[2] completely to the Unitarian Church. In his four years at Harvard Divinity School he was influenced in some measure by Dr. Nathanial Frothingham's sermons[3] which made his listeners acquainted with Eichhom (the German historian, theologian, and orientalist who developed modern ideas concerning the origin of

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1. Goddard, Studies in New England Transcendentalism, p. 23
2. Journal, April 18, 1824
3. Emerson, R. W., Life and Letters in New England from Social Aims

the Bible),[1] and Professor Andrews Norton, Lecturer on Interpretation of the Bible, gave form and method to like studies.[2] Emerson's journals of the period also mention Dr. Channing's sermons, the central themes of which were ever the dignity of human nature and the sacredness of conscience.

The two years after Emerson left Divinity School (1824-1826) are dismal ones of struggle with poor health.[3] In 1826 he was "approbated to preach" by the Middlesex Association of Ministers, but threatening consumption obliged him to spend the following winter in Florida and South Carolina.[3] In the spring of 1827 he started his search for a pulpit[3] and after a period as candidate was offered in the autumn in 1828 the pulpit of the Second Church in Boston as assistant to Henry Ware.[4] The following year Dr. Ware's health broke down and Emerson took his place.[4] He was aware of the increasing apathy which was creeping into the Unitarian Church as the result of formalism and he did not care for the standard degree of devotional fervor in his church; still he believed he had a message which might transcend all this. His sermons during this period are described by their literary executor Mr. Cabot as differing less from conventional modes of the day than would be expected in ethics and doctrine.[5] He reports that the diction is now and then marked by an uncertain phrase, but this is not more noticeable than the

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1. New International Encyclopedia, vol. 7, p. 550
2. Emerson, R. W., Life and Letters in New England
3. Cooke, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 24
4. Garnett, Introduction to Representative Men, XXXIV
5. Woodberry, Ralph Waldo Emerson, pp. 24-25

homely word characterization of his literary style.[1] One of his congregation at that time told Mr. Cabot that the chief impression on his boyish mind was the reality he gave to things of religion,- "they were as real as the things in the street."[2] His sermons are all in manuscript form and he expressed the desire that they remain so.[2] Cabot says,

> "What strikes me in reading them over is first of all the absence of rhetoric. There is no attempt at the eloquence or magniloquence which was then in vogue and of which Emerson in his earlier days had been a warm admirer."[3]

During his ministry he seems to have neither written nor published anything on literary themes with the single exception of a short notice of a collection of hymns printed in a Christian Examiner of 1831 in which he praises the Hebrew psalms.[4]

In 1832, however, the "ice-box of Unitarianism", as he was later to call it,[5] proved too cramping for Emerson's growing spiritual convictions. There was no incompatability in his resignation; there is a quiet, tolerant, kindly letter of farewell to his parish which refuses to see in the incident any breach of friendliness. The whole occasion was Emerson's individual decision that for him at any rate the Lord's Supper was not meant for a permanent institution, and that he could not conduct the symbolic service of commemoration with sincerity.[6]

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1. Woodberry, Ralph Waldo Emerson, pp. 34-35
2. Cabot, Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 151
3. Ibid., p. 151
4. Cooke, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 28
5. Journal, September, 1845
6. Garnett, Representative Men, p. 53

Of his people he wrote, "I cannot go habitually to an institution which they esteem holiest with indifference or dislike."[1] His address of September ninth in which he announced his resignation explains his attitude:

> "It is my desire to do nothing which I cannot do with my whole heart. Having said this, I have said all. I have no hostility to this institution, I am only stating my want of sympathy with it. I am content that it stand to the end of the world, if it please men and please Heaven, and I shall rejoice in all the good it produces."[1]

Thus formally Emerson's connection with Unitarianism closed.

His health again warned him of impending disaster and did not improve to any marked extent through the winter after his formal resignation.[2] Early in the spring of 1833 he sailed for Europe where he stayed for several months absorbing much and making many valuable literary friendships.

Not long after his return he preached for Dr. Orville Dewey in New Bedford for some length of time. It was suggested to him that he might receive a call to the pulpit which Dr. Dewey was on the point of leaving; but he made it clear that he would in such a case not administer the Communion nor would he offer a prayer unless he felt moved to do so.[3] The Church could not accept these terms.

The Divinity School address of 1838 was the first full statement of Emerson's religious belief. Of his unorthodox statements perhaps the most startling were the affirmations that

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1. Garnett, Representative Men, p. 53
2. Cooke, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 35
3. Cabot, Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, vol. 1, p. 215

God acts through every man's soul and should first of all be obeyed there; that Jesus was a great prophet, a man of intuition; but that we have degraded him by adoring him,- we have elevated the man and forgotten the universal power of the truth he taught.[1] What a stir it caused! The Daily Advertiser attacked it in the issue for August 27;[2] The Christian Register of September 29 agreed heartily.[3] In November the Christian Examiner made a formal renunciation of it in behalf of all Unitarianism and of the Cambridge Divinity School in particular,[4] describing the address as "the lucubrations of an individual who has no connection with the school whatever."[5] Friends and foes rose up on all sides. On September 23 Dr. Ware, Emerson's friend and predecessor at the Old North Church, preached a kindly sermon on The Personality of God which described the serious implications of these ideas in their subversion of Christianity.[6] This was immediately printed. Dr. Andrews Norton denounced Emerson's views as an eruption of German atheism.[6] There followed many pamphlets and discourses.

Emerson's attitude toward the whole controversy is typical of him. Dr. Holmes likens his part in it to that "of Patroclus when the Greeks and Trojans fought over his body."[7] Dr. Ware sent Emerson a copy of his sermon and a friendly letter

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1. Cooke, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 67
2. Cabot, Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, vol. 1, p. 334
3. Ibid., p. 337
4. Cooke, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 68
5. Ibid., p. 71
6. Woodberry, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 56
7. quoted in Firkins, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 75

of hope that his criticism had not been unfair; he wished that Emerson would acquaint him more fully with the views he held and with the speculation which had led to them.[1] Emerson's reply was equally friendly and showed the distaste for logical or metaphysical introspection which was so characteristic of him:

> "I delight in telling what I think; but if you ask me how I dare say so, or why it is so, I am the most helpless of mortal men."[2]

O. W. Firkins comments on Emerson's chivalry toward his opponents. Miss Elizabeth Peabody had urged Emerson to reinsert in the printed copy of his address a qualifying and cautionary passage which had been omitted at the time of the delivery. He reflected. Then he decided:

> "No; these gentlemen have committed themselves against what I did read; and it would not now be courteous or fair to spring upon them this passage, which would convict them of unwarranted inference."[3]

As late as 1847 he preached and held himself ready as a layman to read a sermon or to perform such other parts of the service as seemed to him profitable wherever he was asked to do so.[4] In 1837 Dr. Farley, minister of the Second Unitarian Church in Providence, asked Emerson, who was at that time a guest in his house, if he had given up preaching.[5] Emerson answered that he had - almost; but that he sometimes felt an inclination

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1. Cooke, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 72
2. Woodberry, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 57
3. Firkins, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 76
4. Cabot, Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, vol. 1, p. 207
5. Ibid., p. 301

to try the experiment again. Dr. Farley forthwith offered him his pulpit for the following Sunday and gives this interesting account of the results:

> "He selected from Greenwood's collection hymns of a purely meditative character without any distinctly Christian expression; for a Scripture lesson, Ecclesiasticus, from which he also took his text. The sermon was precisely like one of his lectures in style; the prayers, or what took their place, were wholly without supplication, confession, or praise, but very sweet meditations on nature, beauty, order, goodness, love. The house was crowded. After returning home I found Emerson with his head bowed on his hands which were resting on his knees. He looked up and said, 'Now tell me, honestly, plainly just what you think of that service.' I replied that before he was half through I had made up my mind that it was the last time he should have that pulpit. 'You are right,' he rejoined, 'and I thank you. On my part before I was half through I felt out of place. The doubt is solved.'[1]

Cabot says this meant for Emerson merely a decision not to preach again in sections where people did not know him. His last sermon was actually his talk on Worship at Nantucket in the spring of 1847.[2]

The attitudes of other clergymen toward Emerson have given rise to some interesting stories. Alexander Ireland tells the following:[3]

> "Some twenty years ago Emerson addressed a literary society, during Commencement at Middlebury, Vermont, and when he ended, the President called upon a clergyman to conclude the service with a prayer. Then arose a Massachusetts minister who stepped into the pulpit Emerson had just left and uttered a remarkable prayer of which this was one sentence: 'We beseech thee, O Lord, to deliver us from ever hearing any more such transcendental nonsense as we have just listened to from this sacred desk.' After the benediction Mr.

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1. Cabot, Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, vol. 1, p. 301
2. Ibid., p. 498
3. Ireland, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 299

> Emerson asked his next neighbor the name of the officiating clergyman, and when falteringly answered, with gentle simplicity remarked: 'He seemed a very conscientious, plain-spoken man.' and went on his peaceful way."

Dr. Bartol tells of Father Taylor's meeting with the philosopher. Taylor was the eccentric Methodist evangelist of Boston whom Dickens has graphically described. Taylor's attitude, contrary to the expectation of most, was one of whole-hearted approval.

> "'Should Emerson go to Hell,' he declared, 'it would change the climate, and the emigration would be that way.'.....'I have laid my ear close to his heart and never detected any jar in the machinery. He has more of the spirit of Jesus than anybody else I have ever known.'"[1]

Then there is the tale of the Millerite - which seems almost too good to be true. The Seventh Day Adventist was exhorting Emerson that the world was shortly to approach its end. Emerson looked interested but undisturbed. Finally, he said, "Well, let it go. We can get on just as well without it."

As a trick of historic irony, the man who was not interested in the "Unitarian ice-box" had, later, probably more to do with some of the modern tendencies in Unitarianism than any one else. Especially is he acceptable to modern Unitarians as their philosopher, and undoubtedly he helped to turn the older formal rationalistic Unitarianism into its modern mystical channel.

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1. quoted by Ireland, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 305

2. The Influence of Travel

In the spring of 1833 Emerson sailed on his first visit to Europe to visit Sicily, Italy, France, and England.[1]

> "Europe was just in the state in which an intellectually inquisitive visitor would have desired to find her. Experiments were being tried everywhere, including the experiment of standing still. Peace reigned in every European land, save for one local civil war, but the existing political order was undermined everywhere except in England and Russia and hostile tendencies had never clashed more fiercely in the world of thought. Newman was striving to reconcile the Old Church with Anglicanism, Lamennais with socialism. Medieval architecture was coming into fashion; the artistic and literary ideals of the preceding century were falling into disrepute. The Goths of the Romantic school had for the time overwhelmed the traditional classicalism of the Latin nations. Scott reigned in all European literatures; Byron was still a great power; the seed sown by Shelley and Keats was beginning to come up, though their names, like those of Wordsworth and Coleridge, were as yet only heard in England and America.....Goethe had done more for European thought by impregnating it with those germs of an evolutionary doctrine which afforded a battle-ground to the savants of Paris.....On the whole till the leadings of Providence became more evident, the intellectual condition of society must have appeared splendidly anarchical.....Within a year death had removed Goethe, Scott, Hegel, Bentham, and Cuvier. Chateaubriand had retired from active life, and Coleridge was shortly to retire from the world. A great void was thus made for the Titanic Hugos and Carlyles of the age, and its as yet obscure Comtes and Emersons."[2]

And, as the journals kept during these European travels reveal, Emerson made the most of his time. He was bent on self-cultivation. For nine months he revelled in art galleries, cathedrals, and in the analysis of national characteristics. He worked at French, Italian, and Goethe. He attended a program of

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1. Cooke, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 33
2. Garnett, Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 58

lectures at the Sorbonne.[1] He attended operas, theatres, dinners, and at least one fancy-dress ball.[1] He walked and talked with different new types of men on Paris boulevards and Scotch moors.[1] The object of his journey as a literary pilgrimage was to see Landor, Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Carlyle. He gives up pages of his journals to a discussion of them - particularly Carlyle. There was something about this sage of Craigenputtoch that challenged him from the very first. And the friendship that began on the evening when a travel-worn young American presented himself at the hospitable Scottish doorway grew and deepened with the years as we shall see.

3. The Publication of Nature

On October 9, 1833, Emerson reached New York again, restored in health and full of energy, with many a literary and philosophical project "sprouting and blooming in his head" as he wrote to his brother Edward.[2] One dream of his was to settle in the Berkshires with this same brother and to start a magazine to which the two of them should be the chief contributors.[3] This particular scheme was never realized, but on November 4 of this same year he started out on his long career as lecturer with a talk on Natural History at the Masonic Temple in Boston.[4] Three years later in May he put the finishing touches on his first book, Nature, which was published in September, 1836.[5] Ralph

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1. Perry, Emerson Today, p. 42
2. Cabot, Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, vol. 1, p. 171
3. Woodberry, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 41
4. Cooke, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 35
5. Ibid., p. 40

Waldo Emerson was now fairly started upon his career of literary philosopher.

And America was ready for his message. New England of the 1830's was pitiably bound by conservatism. There was little free speech, little literature, and small manliness.[1] "Self-repression was the religion which had been inherited. 'Distrust nature' was the motto written upon the front of the temple."[1] "Poor Richard's" saying "a penny saved is a penny earned" had taken the place of the youthful idealism which sought the west.[2] It was the day of business men, politicians, demagogues. Unitarianism was becoming increasingly rationalistic. There was a poverty of emotion in the air which sounded despair in the heart of the younger generations. "The youths of 1830, like the enfants du siecle in Europe, wanted to be all or nothing. They lamented the uselessness of existence. Repose weighed upon them. Everything they heard, everything they saw or did left them dissatisfied.....The need of going abroad, of escape, went as far as madness and suicide."[3] To these world-weary young comes Emerson's heartening doctrine: Trust thyself. Nature is all good if men will learn to obey her laws.

4. Romanticism

Many were the forces which went into the making and molding of Emerson's philosophy. Perhaps the movement of the day

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1. Chapman, Emerson, p. 10
2. Michaud, The Enraptured Yankee, p. 115
3. Ibid., p. 120

with which his name is most closely linked is that of Transcendentalism. To understand its New England form it is necessary first to know something of the background which Rousseauism had provided for its reception - in America and in Emerson's own life.

With the "expectancy of the land" in the hearts of native and immigrant, attainment of political freedom and a growing sense of Nationalism which we have indicated filled the country in the period from 1800-1850, and with the progress of education which included European current literature and translations,[1] the Romantic Movement found fertile soil in America. Emerson lived at the height of its expression in the nineteenth century, was affected by its preliminary trends, and in turn gave it some of its greatest significance in his own writings. Any survey of his works or life must necessarily include an account of his relation to it.

The eighteenth century had been an age of prose and of reason, of transition and evolution of European life since the Renaissance.[2] Preëminently it was the age of logic and monarchical theory. The French Revolution broke down lines of scholasticism and aristocracy which had been drawn too strictly - and with them, the diefication of the intellect. It was necessary to find a new touchstone for truth, and that was not far to seek in the Rousseauism which had animated the Revolution - the belief that Man's imagination, his practical and moral

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1. Mumford, Golden Day, p. 33
2. Goddard, Studies in New England Transcendentalism, p. 13

natures play a part in his apprehension of the truth.[1] With the conviction that man had been born free and that he was everywhere in chains,[2] the thinkers of the nineteenth century set themselves ostentatiously to rending those chains and to getting back to Nature.

Rousseau's best known works were Julie ou la Nouvelle Heloise, written in 1760, in which he pleaded for the sentiment and sentimentality which his age had spurned, demanding nature and natural love with a very passion of eloquence, - Du Contrat Social, and Émile, published in 1762. The Contract presented the idea that the only natural and right government was that of the people. Émile was a treatise on education with the same skilfully imaginative refrain, "Trust to Nature."[3] These books had caught together the tangled webs of hitherto inexpressible discontent against the court, privileged orders, and the intellectualism of his day, and had woven them into a program of rebellion. Now with actual barriers removed, French culture turned to Rousseau for a plan of reconstruction, and his works became increasingly saleable. Through disciples his ideas spread to Germany, England, Scandinavia, and Russia, crystallizing forms of the incipient intellectual revolutions in these countries, - and thence to America.

Rousseau's fundamental statement had been his contrast between nature and convention.[4] Society, according to him, is

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1. Goddard, Studies in New England Transcendentalism, p. 17
2. Rousseau, Social Contract, p. 1
3. Translation of the three books and the New International Encyclopedia, vol. 20, p. 184
4. Babbitt, Rousseau and Romanticism, p. 45

a mutual agreement among men to preserve the freedom of all, whereby each member gives over his individual sovereignty and receives back an equal portion of the common will through which he becomes as free as he had been before.[1] This collective sovereign power is the only real one. All other powers are usurpations. There is no need to protect the people against this common sovereignty since it is made up of each of their wills, and the people will do themselves no injury. Modern society is a force of artificial constraints not a rule by aristocrats, but by classicists, and humanists, who make their conventions of religion, education, and social intercourse - a tyranny of the intellect of a few. Let each man break with this restraint of habit, recognize his own power of innate goodness, and exercise his right of freedom to the reconstruction of a once more Natural Society.

This scheme of things gave new life to a culture which had been paralyzed with teachings of the religious dread that men were naturally sinful and worthy of salvation only if they should earnestly strive to follow God's laws as interpreted, not by their intuition, but by the reason of a group of ecclesiastics; to classes numbed by heavy taxes, confiscation of property, fear of imprisonment and living torture should they not live as the reason of the King's Court prescribed. The individual felt a new lease of life. He was no longer one of the mob, but a personality of untold resource - a genius.

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1. Rousseau, Social Contract, p. 113

According to Rousseau the prime mark of genius was that it refused to imitate a pattern, but strove to express its own ego, to emancipate a temperamental self which had been artificially restrained. The result was a hysteria of individualism among men of newly-discovered "genius." Artists adorned themselves with frightful moustaches or enormous beards. They wore long hair, smoked continual cigars, and ornamented their studios with human skulls, foils, mandolins, and helmets, hinting dark secrecy and danger in studio life - in short, to quote Chateaubriand, they aimed "to form a separate species between the ape and the satyr."[1] One specialized and experimented in the niceties of one's emotions or the shadings in one's sensations in a bewildering confusion of introspection and extroversion. It was the age of Greenwich villages. Individualism became unidealized into egoism. The negative resolve not to imitate became a positive adolescent exclamation point of being unique.

But beneath this surface foam grew steadily the new impulse of personal worth which, striking deeper currents, gave to literature Madame de Stael, Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Hugo, and Dumas in France; Burns, Wordsworth, Scott, Carlyle, Coleridge, and Keats in England; and Goethe, Schiller, Schlegel, Uhland, and Heine in Germany.[2] For sources the scholar turned to a study of earlier literature, more primitive religion and philosophy - Shakespeare, Celtic stories and Norse sagas, Greek

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1. Babbitt, Rousseau and Romanticism, p. 45
2. Babbitt, Rousseau and Romanticism, Bibliography, pp. 399-419

philosophy and Eastern religions.[1] The Romantic imagination failing to find the world of people-as-they-are always sympathetic, and so feeling an intense loneliness in society, was prone to take refuge in a land of chimeras all its own, a flight from reality in which was confined a "natural" world of such freedom and personality as never could have existed.[2] A passage from Rousseau's letter to the Bailli de Mirabeau will illustrate this tendency:[3]

> January 31, 1761
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> ".....This idle and contemplative life which you do not approve and which I do not excuse, becomes to me daily more delicious; to wander alone endlessly and ceaselessly among the trees and rocks about my dwelling, to muse or rather to be irresponsible as I please, and as you say to go woolgathering;..... finally to give myself up unconstrainedly to my fantasies, which, thank heavens, are all within my power: that, sir, is for me the supreme enjoyment."

In Romantic religion there was no gulf between the human and divine natures. Man had only to look within to his true self; Nature without completed the link, and the symbolic impression of Nature upon Man's soul put him in Communion with God.[4] Sympathy is for Rousseau the chief of human virtues, sympathy which leads in action to altruism, and in society to the brotherhood of man.[4]

The system of Rousseau's ideal education is expressed in Émile: the child's nature is complete in itself.[5] Émile "follows no formula, yields neither to authority nor to example

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1. New International Encyclopedia, vol. 20, p. 115
2. Babbitt, Rousseau and Romanticism, pp. 74-75
3. Ibid., p. 75
4. Ibid., pp. 121-122
5. Rousseau, Emile, p. 141

and neither acts nor speaks save as it seems best to him."[1] "Keep the child dependent on things alone, and you will have followed the order of nature in his education."[2] He is "to bow his neck beneath the hard yoke of physical necessity,"[3] and so learn the fundamental laws of Nature by direct contact with her.

There is no indication in any of Emerson's writings or journals that he was ever influenced directly by an interest in Rousseau. Emerson's contact with Rousseau's Romantic culture in Europe came most directly from his Harvard classes with Edward Everett who had travelled and studied in Europe for five years (1815-1819) while the movement was gathering momentum, taking his Ph.D. at the University of Gottingen where he must certainly have absorbed a great deal of German Romanticism, and he is said to have quoted many English poets of that day in his classroom.[4] I have spoken above of Emerson's admiration for Everett. Channing, Professor of Rhetoric at Harvard, brother of William Ellery Channing, was also greatly interested in the English Romantic Movement, and no doubt he, too, inspired his pupils to read Coleridge and Wordsworth. Coleridge is often quoted in Emerson's Harvard Journals, and later when he goes to England himself in 1833 - his diary reads:

Liverpool, Sept. 1, 1833

"God has shown me the men I wished to see,-

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1. Rousseau, Emile, p. 145
2. Ibid., p. 70
3. Ibid., p. 71
4. Emerson, R. W., Life and Letters in New England

Landor, Coleridge, Carlyle, Wordsworth.....
Many things I owe to these men."[1]

So it is that in Emerson's philosophy we find traces of Rousseauism, reinforced by Unitarianism and Transcendentalism: his trust in intuition, the intrinsic worth of the individual, and the sense of communion with the Divine through the symbolism of Nature which he makes the keynote of his first book of essays, Nature, in 1836. ("In the woods is perpetual youth. We return to reason and faith; all mean egoism vanishes.....The currents of the Universal Being circulate through me.")[2]

We find traces of the Romantic escape into Chimeraland in Emerson's college journals, one of which he dedicates to the Gnomes.[3] Another is called The Wide World.[4] In a January entry he dreams: "with Indians enchanters I send my soul up to wander among the stars till 'the twilight of the Gods.'" Again, the same year, on March 11, he writes: "I would plunge into the classic lore of chivalrous story and of the fairyland bards, and inclosing the ponderous volumes of the firmest believers in magic and in the firmest potency of consecrated crosier or elfin ring, I would let my soul sail away into their wildest phantasies." In his more mature writings we find little of this unless we except the wealth of mythical allusion in his essays and such poems as Uriel or Merlin, both written in 1846.

The Romantic sense of loneliness, too, was in Emerson

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1. Emerson, Journal, 1833
2. Emerson, R. W., Nature (opening paragraph)
3. Journal, 1820
4. Journal, 1821

and its corresponding appeal to nature for solace and recreation. The conventions which were hollow to Rousseau were to Emerson standards whose worth was to be tested by the individual - not objects to be shied at or accepted because they were conventions. But Edward Horton makes this important and true distinction:

> "Rousseau lauds the natural man as we find him in the barbaric rudeness of the uncivilized stage; Emerson eulogized the natural man as we find him master of arts, society, and culture."[1]

And Michaud adds:

> "Of romance in the popular sense of the word, there is not a trace in the existence of Emerson. External events are nothing, he declared; the inner man is all. Yet he never ceased to assert the highly romantic character of existence. His life was a perpetual exercise of curiosity, a perpetual expectation, a perpetual admiration. The romance of life, according to him, was the meeting, the possible drawing together of the real and the ideal, of the universe lived and the universe thought in a vast spirit and a warm heart, meeting, approach, always uncertain, contingent, problematical, which he believed, gave life its adventurous and poetic character."[2]

5. The Influence of Transcendentalism

Through liberal trends in Religion and the impressions of the Romantic Movement, Transcendentalism came to New England, influencing Emerson and in turn influenced by him.

Transcendentalism proper began in Germany, with Kant's Kritik der reinen Vernunft in 1781.[3] The German philosopher here used the term "transcendent" to designate qualities that lie

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1. Horton, Ralph Waldo Emerson, sermon, p. 5
2. Michaud, The Enraptured Yankee, preface, p. xvi
3. Frothingham, Transcendentalism in New England, p. 15

outside of all experience - fundamental conceptions, universal and necessary categories which transcend any experience, but which impose conditions that make experience dependent upon knowledge - these were the primary laws of the mind, the ground of absolute truth. This idea was taken by Jacobi and expanded into the belief that humankind possessed a faculty of knowing truth by faith independently of the sensual or supersensual world.[1] This theory he illustrated by experience of the spiritual life in Religion. So Transcendentalism was given its first impulse toward Mysticism. Fichte thereupon presented to human thought the possibility that man can know nothing but his own ideas. He gives himself no concern about external things; it is sufficient to him that he endeavor to be, not to seem. From this inner world of his he apprehends reality not by knowledge, but by faith, "that voluntary repose in the ideas that naturally come to us, because through these only we can fulfill our destiny."[2] Schelling then takes the systems formulated so far and adds his own thought that the world outside is objective Reality. Thought and existence ideally are one - to the absolute mind. For him the work of philosophy becomes twofold: to arrive at spirit from Nature; to arrive at Nature from Spirit.[3]

Transcendentalism communicated to France chiefly through German literature, became engulfed in the sensational

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1. Frothingham, Transcendentalism in New England, p. 23
2. Ibid., p. 27
3. Ibid., p. 40

philosophy of the French Revolution, receiving its most adequate expression in Naine de Biran and Cousin.[1]

Transcendentalism came to England through Coleridge's interest in and translation of Schelling's works.[1] Carlyle proved an able second by translations from Goethe, Fichte, and Novalis.[1] Wordsworth added his enthusiasm for the whole German movement, and communicated it through a poetic, imaginative, interpretation of the impression it made upon his life.[2]

Transcendentalism took on a still newer form when it came to New England.[3] Life here was still plastic, not yet stratified. In Europe the theories had been the study of a cultured few, but here they touched social life.[3] Individual desire for freedom was ripe for its reception. It was for this reason that it worked out later in practical and impractical reforms. Puritans had been idealists in the very force of their revolt against Catholicism which was to them a materialistic system dependent upon ceremony.[4] Unitarianism, which had satisfied the first tide of liberalism, had proved Lockean - looking for knowledge, not for inspiration. In fact, nearly all the young transcendentalists were Unitarians and many of them were clergymen.[5] "The Unitarians had pronounced human nature to be excellent; the transcendentalists pronounced it divine."[6] Literature of Transcendentalism came into New

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1. Frothingham, Transcendentalism in New England, p. 60
2. Ibid., pp. 76 and 97
3. Ibid., p. 105
4. Ibid., p. 108
5. Parrington, The Romantic Revolution in America, p. 381
6. Ibid., p. 382

England as early as 1805. There had been a lecture on Kant in Paris the year preceding, and several copies of his original works found their way to the United States.[1]

But it never really began to take root until 1820 when Edward Everett, newly returned from five years' sojourn in Europe, began to interpret Kant through exegitical discourses on the style of Voss, Wolff, Ruhnken, and Ante-Homeric remains.[2] About the same time William Ellery Channing was preaching his almost superstitious ideas on the sacredness of conscience and the worth of human nature to young people like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, George Ripley, and Frederick H. Hedge.[1] We may judge that he was influenced and influenced others in turn by the philosophy of Coleridge and the poetry of Wordsworth, I think, when we know that in 1821 he went to England and visited both these leaders of Transcendentalism there.[1] An extract from a letter of his written in 1820 shows even more clearly the trend of his thought at that time:[3]

> "I have told you before how much I think Unitarianism has suffered from union with a heart-withering philosophy. It has suffered also from a too exclusive application of its advocates to biblical criticism and theological controversy..... I fear we must look to other schools for thoughts that thrill us, which touch the most inward springs, and disclose to us the depths of our own souls."

New England Transcendentalism was the culmination of the liberal movement of American Unitarianism in the eighteenth

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1. International Encyclopedia
2. Emerson, R. W., Life and Letters in New England (Social Aims)
3. quoted in Goddard, Studies in New England Transcendentalism

century - and a revolt from it.[1] It was taken up by young Unitarian ministers who were beginning to chafe under formality. David Gray makes it clear that the group of men who comprised the New England transcendentalist group were not interested in the philosophy for its own sake; but used it merely as a basis for their attitude towards religion and conduct.[2] With them it was more than an abstract theory; it became a movement. As a movement it affected the literature of the time - it appeared in reform and political pamphlets, in newspapers and in magazines.[3] Bancroft was its representative in the field of history.[3] But perhaps it was in the poetry of the age that it can be most distinctly recognized. It was a creative power, still the most important influence that has affected American literature in the opinion of George Willis Cooke.[4]

Perhaps the best definition given of its spirit is by Frances Tiffany in an article in the Unitarian Review.[5]

> "First and foremost, it can only be rightly concerned as an intellectual, aesthetic, and spiritual ferment, not a strictly reasoned doctrine. It was a Renaissance of conscious, living faith in the power of reason, in the reality of spiritual insight, in the privilege, beauty, and glory of life."

In 1823 during his period of study at Harvard Divinity School and the year after Channing's return from England, Emerson wrote to his Aunt Mary:

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1. Goddard, Studies in New England Transcendentalism, p. 31
2. Gray, Emerson, p. 7
3. Frothingham, Transcendentalism in New England, p. 381
4. Cooke, editor, The Poets of Transcendentalism, preface, p. 3
5. quoted in Gray, Emerson, p. 12

> "Dr. Channing is preaching sublime sermons every Sunday morning in Federal Street."

and the following year in that long passage in his journal (April 18, 1824) in which he estimates his abilities as a theologian, he says:

> "The highest species of reasoning upon divine subjects is rather the fruit of a moral imagination than of The Reasoning Machines such as Locke and Clarke and David Hume. Dr. Channing's Dudleian lecture is the model of what I mean, and the faculty which produced this is akin to the higher flights of fancy. I may add that the preaching most in vogue at the present day depends chiefly on imagination for its success."

Emerson was reading Wordsworth, De Stael, Byron, Coleridge, and Goethe during the whole of his college life as we know from quotations in his journals of that period.

In 1832 Emerson, the young preacher, raised the whole issue of Transcendentalism in the sermon in which he advanced the view of the Communion Service which finally led to his resignation from the pastorship.[1] The same year we find the first mention of Carlyle in his diary.

In September, 1836, he summed up his own conception and experience of Transcendentalism in his first slim volume of essays, Nature. In this we see him as an idealist, but not as a profound metaphysician.[2] The three main ideas in the book are more or less an elaboration of their several phases.[2] In summary they are:[3]

1. Every man is an inlet to the divine soul of the

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1. Frothingham, Transcendentalism in New England, p. 120
2. Woodberry, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 48; and Emerson, R. W., Nature, The Oversoul, and History
3. Emerson, R. W., Nature, section on Language

universe and within every part of the universe is the soul of the whole. In man are the means of all knowledge of himself, of Nature, and of God.

2. Nature is a symbol of the Divine spirit and every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact - a metaphor of mind, and the realization of God in the unconscious. Nature's function is to put man into communion with God. "Man is in the center of things and a ray of relation passes from every other being to him."

3. There is an open way from God to man and from man to God. Yet this sense of Divine inflowing is not always felt, but only in the depth of certain brief moments of exaltation do we know reality. These may be attested to only by the individual; they are mysteries of the impersonal being.

A far cry from Kant to New England!

In this same September (1836), on the day of the celebration on the second centennial anniversary of Harvard College, Emerson, George Ripley, and Frederick Hedge had a chance conversation upon the state of current opinion in Philosophy and Religion.[1] They agreed upon the unsatisfactoriness of the serious philosophy of their day, which dated from Locke, and which had been made the basis of Unitarian theology. It was agreed also because of the ferment which Coleridge's poems and Carlyle's Characteristics and Signs of the Times had created in the minds of some of the younger clergy, that there was promise

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1. Hedge, quoted in Cabot, Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, vol. 1, p. 244

of a new era. The four decided to call a larger group of friends together the following week and to continue the discussion, with the result that about a dozen men met at George Ripley's house in Boston at the appointed time, including Orestes Brownson and Theodore Parker. Interest reached so high a point that the following week there was another, larger meeting at Emerson's house in Concord, which included:

> "George Ripley, philosopher and fervent spiritualist; Orestes Brownson, ardent polémiste, man of sudden changes, who passed in one day from transcendentalism to Rome, burning behind him all he had adored; Theodore Parker, the fiery apostle, always battling, always charging, whose brain was an arsenal of erudition, a polygot library; Alcott, the soul of the circle and sharp-shooter of the ideal; Freeman Clarke and William Henry Channing, adepts in the religion of humanity; Elizabeth Peabody, importer of ideas and of European books, whose bookshop in Boston was the headquarters of these gentlemen; Sarah Alden Ripley, who combined with the cares of housekeeping the advanced study of Greek, German, and the differential calculus; and finally Margaret Fuller, the inspired, the stimulator, who had read everything, seen everything, and whom everything set in vibration."[1]

This was the beginning of the famous Transcendentalist Club, a name given to them first by the village gossipers. The group did not all hold to Emerson's ideas of Transcendentalism as expressed in Nature,- quite the contrary. Dr. James Freeman Clarke affirms that no two of the club thought alike; but their similarity of ideals were enough to make them stimulating company for one another.[2]

> "Everything took place in free conversations in the course of which they discussed Kant, Jouffroy,

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1. Michaud, The Enraptured Yankee, p. 168
2. Cabot, Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, vol. 1, p. 246

> Cousin, Benjamin Constant, Coleridge, Carlyle. Parker thundered, Alcott uttered oracles, Margaret Fuller gave herself up to her familiar improvisations on art and the beautiful, exalting Raphael, Goethe, and Beethoven, whose symphonies were being played for the first time in America, commenting upon the last novel of Balzac or George Sand. From time to time Channing, always enthusiastic about liberty, came to bless the assembly.
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> Emerson used to listen. He loathed verbiage and more than once he must have believed himself back in the Pythologian Club of Harvard, but the conversations excited him and in the Symposium one was among people who knew philosophy and letters."[1]

"It was the feeling that the world was nowhere, 'Nailed up with boards,' but open on all sides if we will but open our eyes,- an intolerance of authority and convention, and not any definite opinions they had in common,- that brought the Transcendentalists together."[2] Their Transcendentalism they expressed variously according to their natures through literary criticism and literature, theology, philosophy, and social reform.

In 1837 came Emerson's American Scholar, and in 1838 the Divinity School Address. By 1840 Theodore Parker had begun to preach the spirit of Transcendentalism from the pulpit.[3] The Dial, the mouthpiece of the Club, was published from 1840-1844, first with Margaret Fuller as editor and later with Emerson.[3] By 1844 Transcendentalism was in the heyday of its vigor.

Emerson, because of the prominence he won in the literary world, has often been accused of being the exciting

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1. Michaud, The Enraptured Yankee, p. 169
2. Cabot, Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, vol. 1, p. 246
3. Frothingham, Transcendentalism in New England, p. 127

force behind the whole movement of transcendentalism. Our better critics do not seem to think this was the case. David Gray writes:

> "Emerson bears much the same relation to the Transcendentalism of New England as Socrates bore to the Sophists of Athens; he was distinctly one of them, yet distinctly apart....."[1]

Chapman agrees:

> "Emerson was in no way responsible for the movement, although he got the credit of having evoked it by his teaching. He was elder brother to it and was generated by its parental forces; but even if Emerson had never lived, the Transcendentalists would have appeared."[2]

Bliss Perry declares emphatically:

> "At least three-fourths of Emerson's published writings have little or nothing of Transcendentalism in them."[3]

Woodberry believes that Emerson had even no real understanding of the philosophical implications involved:

> "His grasp upon transcendentalism was neither profound nor various; he was not a metaphysician. He was a literary man who read miscellaneously and picked and chose what he liked, taking his own where he found it....."[4]

6. The Influence of Plato and the Neo-Platonists

The doctrines of Plato, particularly as interpreted by the Neo-Platonists, were in the air as Emerson grew to manhood. Mary Moody Emerson introduced Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus to him early in his career. The journals of 1830-1831, 1834, 1838,

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1. Gray, Emerson, p. 15
2. Chapman, Emerson and Other Essays, p. 65
3. Perry, Emerson Today, p. 19
4. Woodberry, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 45

1841-1843 show that he continued to read and ponder their doctrines. He began Plato in the original Greek, laboriously and with probable incomplete understanding since Emerson was no linguist.[1] Then for a while he used a French translation.[1] Finally he came upon the translation by Thomas Taylor and may have been influential in seeing that the Harvard Library acquired copies of the same book in 1843.[2]

Taylor (1758-1835) was an enthusiastic student of Neo-Platonism who had become so fascinated by its doctrines that he gave a Neo-Platonic coloring to the doctrines of Plato himself.[3] We may judge that Emerson's knowledge of Plato came largely from this translation, I think, when we find that in the minds of the scholars of today Emerson identified many sayings of Plato with those of Neo-Platonism.

There was a close intellectual relationship existing between Neo-Platonism and the Transcendental School of Thought. Coleridge initiated the Transcendentalists into Neo-Platonism, realizing probably as few of his disciples did, that the Neo-Platonists were the philosophical precursors of the Transcendentalists.[2] Bronson Alcott's visit to England won for him the friendship of the two English mystics, Wright and Lane, whose library was brought to America in 1842 at the time of their participation in Alcott's socialistic experiment with Fruitlands. In the early forties Neo-Platonism was attracting the attention

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1. Perry, Emerson Today, p. 65
2. Carpenter, Emerson and Asia, p. 48
3. Perry, Emerson Today, p. 65

of Greater Boston's literati.[1]

The motto for the first edition of Emerson's little book, Nature, was chosen from the sayings of Plotinus,- "Nature is but an image or imitation of wisdom, the last thing of the soul; Nature being a thing which doth only do, but not know."[2]- and in a quatrain of the poem Song of Nature, Emerson puts Plotinus in the company with Jesus, Shakespeare, and Plato.[3]

Emerson often followed the suggestions of Neo-Platonism in his interpretations of the levels of human life, but he preferred the world of his own experience to the conclusions of the medieval philosophers in his final conclusions.[4]

His belief in the world of nature as a divine language is in general Neo-Platonic; as is his doctrine of the Over-Soul.[5] His theory of poetry is the development of a concept of the same philosophy and he quotes copiously from the Neo-Platonists to clarify his doctrine of art.[5] Ideal imitation, the equality of art and nature, the inspiration of the Over-Soul: all these are essentially ideas of Plotinus.[5]

John S. Harrison has written a scholarly book called The Teachers of Emerson, the chief contention of which is:

> "If one examines the chief centers of his teaching to be found in his conception of nature, soul, love, beauty, art, and mythology, he will find that Emerson in his most characteristic utterances is indebted to Plato and the Platonists."[6]

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1. Carpenter, Emerson and Asia, p. 48
2. Harrison, The Teachers of Emerson, p. 3
3. Perry, Emerson Today, p. 67
4. Carpenter, Emerson and Asia, p. 82
5. Ibid., p. 83
6. Harrison, The Teachers of Emerson, p. 3

Although not all critics agree with a statement so absolute, we recommend Harrison's development of his thesis to any one who is interested in studying this particular influence more deeply.

7. The Influence of the East

Neo-Platonism opened the door to Emerson's study of oriental literature and philosophy.[1] His special interest in Plotinus and his more general interest in oriental literature began simultaneously. His Aunt Mary, who, as we have said before, was an important figure in his intellectual development, had come upon the books of the East[1] and lost no time in recommending them to her nephew.

The Eastern Scriptures were one of the sources for a new basis of morality sought by the European Romantic Schools. Translations of them were made in England and copies came to America around the year 1820 when Edward Everett was communicating to Harvard classrooms and lecture halls his enthusiasm for Grecian and Orphic sacred literature. Emerson's early journals contain selections from the Mahabarata, the Apocrypha, the Zendavesta, and from Zoroaster.

About the year 1837 Emerson read more and more deeply in Oriental books as his journals show. In 1842-1843 he, with Henry David Thoreau, published monthly selections of quotations from the Ethnical Scriptures (the different sacred books of the

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1. Carpenter, Emerson and Asia, p. 43

Orient) in the last two volumes of the Dial. By 1850 the results of this reading began to appear in his lectures and at about the same time he began to keep a separate journal called the Orientalist, a receptacle for significant quotations from his readings in "the philosophy of India, the poetry of Persia and Arabia and the wisdom of all the Oriental countries at once."[1]

In the middle of the century he did much to encourage an interest in the Orient which Romanticism had brought to New England. Thoreau received a shipment of Oriental books from England at about this time and eventually these passed into Emerson's library.[2]

Of all the Oriental philosophies he met with in his reading, that of the Hindus was most far-reaching in effect. On July 18, 1840, he writes to a friend of his,

> "In the sleep of the great heats there was nothing for me but to read the Vedas, the bible of the tropics, which I find I come back upon every three or four years. It is sublime as heat and night and a breathless ocean. It contains every religious sentiment, all the grand ethics which visit in turn each noble and poetic mind, and nothing is easier than to separate what must have been the primeval inspiration from the endless ceremonial nonsense which caricatures and contradicts it through every chapter. It is of no use to put away the book: if I trust myself in the woods or in a boat upon the pond, nature makes a Bramin of me presently: eternal necessity, eternal compensation, unfathomable power, unbroken silence,- this is her creed. Peace, she saith to me, and purity and absolute abandonment - these penances expiate all sin and bring you to the beatitude of the 'Eight Gods.'"[3]

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1. Carpenter, Emerson and Asia, p. 21
2. Ibid., p. 48
3. Letters to a Friend

Not only did he owe his poems Brahma and Hamatreya entirely to the Hindu writers, but large parts of his essays on Plato, Fate, Illusions, and Immortality, and his famous verses on the Sphinx are clearly marked with their influence.[1] Frederic Ives Carpenter even goes so far as to say :

> "Emerson's poem Brahma probably expresses the central idea of Hindu philosophy more clearly and concisely than any other writing in the English language - perhaps better than any writing in Hindu literature itself."[1]

Formichi, an Italian critic of Emerson, sees definite evidence of this Eastern influence. He writes:

> "Piu che a Platone, il grande scrittore americano si avvicina ai vati dell' India autori delle Upanishad."[2]
>
> "Abbiamo cioè un vate moderno americano che riceve dalla Natura le stesse impressioni di un vetusto profeta dell' India."[3]

> "The Persian poets," says Bliss Perry, "gave Emerson a peculiar delight. He wrote poems and essays about them, translated many poems from Baron Purgstall's German translations, and appropriated the name of Saadi - 'the poet of joy' - as a sort of disguised name for himself, a stalking horse under which he could shoot the arrows of his own wit. He loved Hafiz also, and all his metaphors about wine and roses. He adorned his letters and journals and lectures with gaily colored quotations from these old Persians."[4]

They preached to him his own ideals of freedom, sincerity, and self-reliance. We find their spirit particularly in his poems Days and Bacchus.[5]

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1. Carpenter, Emerson and Asia, p. 103
2. Formichi, Scienza e Fede nell' Opera di Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 17
3. Ibid., p. 18
4. Perry, Emerson Today, p. 79
5. Carpenter, Emerson and Asia, p. 179

Arabian literature and the Koran he read and quoted all along the way. He delighted particularly in their folk-tales and proverbs[1] and these are sprinkled throughout his lectures.

The references to Zoroaster in Emerson came for the most part from his acquaintance with the Zoroastrian Forgeries in translation. It is not until the very end of his life that we find the Zend-Avesta listed among the books he has read.[2]

Although Emerson had as much opportunity to read Chinese classics as to peruse the rest of Oriental literature in translation, he does not show the same interest in them. Carpenter says,

> "Chinese literature and Buddhism are the only two Oriental systems which Emerson did not wholly welcome. Buddhism epitomized the quietism of the East and its passiveness. Chinese literature epitomized its formalism and its lack of progressive element."[3]

Interesting in this connection, although not particularly significant since we take a missionary layman's impression against a scholar's reasoned opinion, is a story which Oliver Wendell Holmes tells in a speech in appreciation of Emerson before the Massachusetts Historical Society:

> "So impressed with this Asiatic character of his mind was Mr. Burlingame, as I saw him after his return from his Mission, that he said to me in a freshet of hyperbole which was the overflow of a channel with a thread of truth running in it, 'There are twenty thousand Ralph Waldo Emersons in China.'"

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1. Carpenter, Emerson and Asia, p. 199
2. Ibid., p. 179
3. Ibid., p. 233

It is a question - just how much this many-sided New Englander was influenced by the East. It confirmed him in a few of his most cherished notions and appealed to his imagination; but on the whole we are inclined to agree with John Jay Chapman that "The East added nothing to Emerson, but gave him a few trappings of speech."[1]

Since for Emerson India represented the East most really it seems fitting to close this section with a quotation from Protap Chundar Mozsomdar who once lectured in this country on the topic "Emerson as Seen from India." He says among other things:

> "Emerson had all the wisdom and spirituality of the Brahmins. Brahminism is an acquirement, a state of being rather than a creed. In whomsoever the eternal Brahma breathed his unquenchable fire, he was a Brahmin. And in that sense Emerson was the best of Brahmins....."[2]

And even more significantly,

> "I do not know why, but as often as I study his features in the imperfect photograph which I possess, the idea of Nirvana as taught by the great Sakya Muni suffuses my soul. There is that hushed, ineffable, self-contained calmness over his countenance, so familiar to us who have studied the expression of Gatama's image in every posture."[3]

8. <u>The Influence of People</u>

It would seem that this section were incomplete if some word were not said about the influence of definite person-

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1. Chapman, <u>Emerson and Other Essays</u>, p. 46
2. Ibid., p. 371
3. Ibid., p. 370

alities on Emerson. But this is more than usually difficult to trace. There is scarcely a biographer who does not remark upon Emerson's imperviousness to influence. It was a matter of temperament with him. There was in him from his very boyhood a maturity and deliberation, a physical inertia and tendency toward procrastination which provided the perfect soil for whatever the doctrines of Idealism, Transcendentalism, and self-reliant liberalism. He is his own best example of the God-reliance which he preached. His nature guarded him against the enthusiasm of the moment. At nineteen he bemoans the poverty of his heart's history:

> "I have not the kind affections of a pigeon. Ungenerous and selfish, cautious and cold, I yet wish to be romantic; have not sufficient feeling to speak a natural, hearty welcome to a friend or stranger, and yet send abroad wishes and fancies of a friendship with a man I never knew."[1]

At forty he is trying unsuccessfully to explain his reserve to a reproachful Margaret Fuller who wishes a greater share of his confidence than he can bring himself to give her. His affections were real enough, as his friends could testify, and as we shall try to show in our section on his friends, but there was a certain native aloofness about Emerson which almost predetermined his philosophy.

We have mentioned Moncure Conway's classification of early influences as the Three Fates: his mother, his Aunt Mary, and Sarah Bradford Ripley. To Edward Everett Hale he owed his first glimpse into the civilizations of Greece and India, his first acquaintance with Coleridge and Wordsworth and the rhythm of

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1. Journal, May 13, 1823

mighty sentences which sung themselves in the back of his brain and were to come forth later in his own writings. William Ellery Channing gave him insight into his own convictions of the liberal viewpoint in religion, and strengthened his desire to formulate new moral codes for himself.

Clarence Paul Hotson has written an article for the New England Quarterly called Sampson Reed, a Teacher of Emerson. Sampson Reed was the druggist at Concord who first interested Emerson in the teachings of Swedenborg by means of his little book, Observations on the Growth of the Mind, published in 1826. Emerson's journals of the period (c. 1830) show that the book made a decided impression on his mind and his essay upon Swedenborg in Representative Men shows that the impression was a lasting one. Mr. Hotson maintains that it was Sampson Reed who gave Emerson the first definite impulse toward his literary career.[1] He believes further that Reed's frequent contributions to the New Jerusalem Magazine were read by his Concord fellow-citizen and quoted in his journals;[2] that these together with the book which Emerson over a period of forty-five years mentions in terms of high praise seven times, influenced the form, symbolism, and content of his first publication, Nature.[3]

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1. Hotson, Sampson Reed, New England Quarterly, vol. 2, no. 2, 1929, p. 249
2. Ibid., p. 253
3. Ibid., p. 276

His literary style seems not to have been affected by any one. The ornate rhetoric so much in vogue during his boyhood and early twenties left no lasting imprint upon him. Cooke says that Carlyle, Goethe, Coleridge and Landor have been mentioned as his masters, but the marks of literary influence of either in his books are but slight.[1]

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1. Cooke, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 219

C. Emerson's Literary Life and his Associations with Men and Books

1. Emerson's Literary Life*

With Emerson's publication of Nature in September, 1836, his Phi Beta Kappa Address on the American Scholar in August, 1837, and his Divinity School Address on July of the following year, his literary-philosophical career was well under way. Phillips Russell sums up this triple impact of Emerson's message by writing: "In Nature he gave them a new way of seeing; in the American Scholar a new way of thinking, and in the Divinity School Address a new way of believing."[1]

The circle which he reached with his little book on Nature was at first not large. Only five hundred copies were sold in twelve years.[2] The Christian Examiner (chief organ of the Unitarians) treated it with insulting indulgence, as a poetical rhapsody....."on the whole producing the impression of a disordered dream."[3] It was twelve years before a new edition was called for.[3] But the people whom these five hundred copies reached were destined to leaven a larger group with a taste for Emersonian ideas.

His American Scholar has justly been called by Oliver Wendell Holmes the American intellectual Declaration of Independence. In brief he says,

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*Supplemented by the chronological table of Emerson's life in the appendix.

1. Russell, Emerson, p. 157
2. Woodberry, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 61
3. Cabot, Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, vol. 1, pp. 261-262

> "Our day of dependence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands draws to a close.....We will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; we will speak our own minds.....a nation of men will for the first time exist, because each believes himself inspired by the Divine Will, which also inspires all men."

His Divinity School Address which, as we have shown above, caused so much discussion and incidentally, publicity, for the rising young lecturer, was likewise a spiritual declaration of independence.

> "Let me admonish you," spoke Emerson, "first of all, to go alone: to refuse the good models, even those which are sacred in the imagination of men, and dare to love God without mediator or veil.....Thank God for these good men, but say 'I am also a man'.....Yourself a new-born bard of the Holy Ghost, cast behind you all conformity and acquaint yourself at first hand with the Deity."

From 1836 onward he lectured for his fellow-citizens in Concord at least once a year and as his reputation grew he was called to other gatherings as the chronological table in the Appendix will show. The period from 1835-1845, Emerson's thirty-second to his forty-second year, was the heyday of Boston Transcendentalism and also the period of Emerson's greatest productivity.[1] He is filling an increasing number of lecture engagements and his lectures are being sought by editors of current magazines. His first series of essays is published in 1841, the second in 1844, and although these bring him very little money at first, his popularity grows steadily.[2]

In the early part of 1836 Emerson furnished the copy

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1. Cabot, Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, vol. 2, p. 457
2. Ibid., p. 458

and a preface for the publications (set on foot by Dr. le Baron Russell) of Carlyle's Sartor Resartus from the pages of Fraser's Magazine before the book appeared in England,[1] and before the end of the year he was able to announce to his friend across the sea the sale of the whole edition.[2] This was only the beginning of a long period of similar literary services on his part. His bargainings with booksellers in Carlyle's behalf fill many pages in the Carlyle-Emerson correspondence.

In 1839 the members of the Transcendentalist Club felt the need of a magazine. This was a welcome project to Emerson who had dreamed of starting some sort of review - a kind of modern Spectator Paper. He hoped it would not be too literary, but would read the law on property, government, and education as well as on art, letters, and religion. "I wish we might court some of the good fanatics," he wrote to Carlyle, "and publish chapters on every head in the whole art of being."[3] He wrote the introductory section in the first number and lent editor Margaret Fuller staunch support until in 1842 he found the burden of editorship upon his own shoulders.*

> "Mysticism, sociology, theology, metaphysics, literature, religion, fine arts, ancient, modern, and foreign books, Platonism, Buddhism, eclecticism, Swedenborgianism, mesmerism, phrenology, novels, confessions, sermons, essays, poems, all this in that inspired tone - how instructive, touching, generous, pathetic, this Dial, in which young America, now its own master and tearing itself from its theological swaddling clothes, threw itself bravely

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1. Cabot, Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, vol. 1, p. 240
2. Cooke, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 46
3. Russell, Emerson, p. 184

*See Appendix for contents of first number and list of Emerson's contributions

upon the Good, the True, and the Beautiful with a conviction, a zest worthy of a better fate."[1]

Carlyle found it "Too aurora-borealis like"; "yet Margaret Fuller's Dial was often treasured in England" and it made better known to the reading public Thoreau, Lowell, Dana, and her own contributions on German literature, criticism, music, and art.[2] Under Emerson's guidance the magazine became somewhat less diffuse and literary, somewhat more timely and specific;[3] but its contributors were not sufficiently many in numbers to supply the necessary funds and the venture came to an end in 1844.

In 1847 Emerson took his second trip to Europe. The spring before he sailed there had been several meetings at his house of men who desired a quarterly review which should treat questions of the day neglected by the North American Review.[4] Among the more prominent men interested were Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe and Theodore Parker. The latter wished Emerson to act as editor, but he, perhaps remembering weary hours with Dial proof-sheets, declined. Dr. Howe, Parker, and Emerson were finally appointed a committee to draw up a manifesto.[4] This turned out to be largely Emerson's work, but Theodore Parker undertook the editorship.[4] The first copy of the new Review reached the traveller in England where to his surprise he discovered his name upon its covers as an associate editor.[5] He

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1. Michaud, The Enraptured Yankee, p. 173
2. Russell, Emerson, p. 185
3. Ibid., p. 188
4. Cabot, Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, vol. 2, p. 497
5. Woodberry, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 68

resolved, however, to take no further active part in the enterprise, and his name was withdrawn from the succeeding issues.[1] He follows its fortunes, however. In a letter to his wife in January, 1848, he remarks that it has "no intellectual tone, no literary skill,- it will soon sink into a North American Review."[2] In another letter written on April of the same year he exclaims, "It is certain that the Massachusetts Quarterly Review will fail unless Henry Thoreau and Alcott and Channing and Charles Newcomb fly to the rescue."[3]

In 1847 and 1848 Emerson lectured in England, Scotland, and Paris. The following year he is reëditing the fifth book in Nature, arranging for its second edition, and preparing Representative Men for the Press which publishes it in January of 1850.

All this time Emerson's children, Edith, Ellen, and Edward Waldo are growing up. A good many years afterward Dr. Edward Waldo Emerson remembers that his father used to like to recite to them poems and prose passages which were somewhat above their heads - from Southey, Froissart, Burke, Charles Lamb, or James Russell Lowell.[4] He required his son to read two pages in Plutarch's Lives every schoolday and ten pages on Saturdays and vacation mornings.[5]

From the year 1850 on for a period of nearly twenty

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1. Woodberry, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 68
2. Cabot, Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, vol. 2, p. 515
3. Ibid., p. 531
4. Emerson, Edward, Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 170
5. Ibid., p. 174

years a western lecturing tour became a regular employment for the winter.

In 1854 he denounced the Fugitive Slave Law; 1855 saw him giving a long anti-slavery address in Boston.

In April, 1857, he conferred with James Russell Lowell and Richard Henry Dana on the projected new magazine, The Atlantic Monthly, which left the press for the first time in November, 1857.[1] Emerson contributed in all twenty-eight articles to be found in numbers from the first to the thirty-seventh volume; more than half his manuscripts are verse.[1]

From April, 1858, Emerson dined monthly with the Saturday Club in Boston. A group of literati met for discussion and a good dinner at "Parker's", the Will's Coffee House of Boston.[2] Oliver Wendell Holmes says that Emerson was one of the original members of the Saturday Club and the nucleus around which the club formed itself.[3] To this club belonged: Agassiz, Cabot, Dwight, Forbes, Hoar, Holmes, S. G. Howe, Longfellow, Lowell, and Norton.[4] Emerson, as was his wont, took little active part in the brilliant discussions which he, nevertheless, enjoyed fully. He liked to sit near Longfellow at table, to smoke, and to listen quietly.

English Traits was published in 1856, The Conduct of Life in 1860, and Society and Solitude in 1870. After 1866 he wrote little that was new.[5] In 1870 he gives a course of

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1. Woodberry, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 221. See Appendix for complete list.
2. Ibid., p. 222
3. quoted in Cabot, Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, vol. 2, p. 619
4. Emerson's Journal, April 24, 1864
5. Cabot, Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, vol. 2, p. 627

university lectures to thirty Harvard students on The Natural History of the Intellect.[1] His last piece of original composition seems to have come in the same year, the preface to an edition of Plutarch.[1]

In 1874 he was proposed for the Lord Rectorship of Glasgow University and received five hundred votes against Disraeli's seven hundred.[2] In the same year his daughter Edith, who, with the other children, had heard her father recite poetry from her earliest remembrance, urged him to collect and print a volume of his favorite verses.[3] This he did, calling the resulting anthology Parnassus. In 1875 he is made an associate member of the French Academy.[2]

In 1878 he gives his one hundredth lecture at the Concord Lyceum.[4] As late as this he likes to read a paper occasionally, but his memory is failing him and he sometimes confuses the sheets of his lecture.[5] His last public appearances are on February, 1881, when he reads a paper on Carlyle at the Concord School of Philosophy and when he lectures on Aristocracy in July of the same year.[6]

The audiences at Emerson's lectures were composed of not more than three to five hundred persons, and are said to have been made up of these same persons year after year.[7] But his

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1. Woodberry, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 179
2. Ibid., p. 181
3. Firkins, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 153
4. Woodberry, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 182
5. Cabot, Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, vol. 2, p. 670
6. Woodberry, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 182
7. Ibid., p. 61

intensive influence upon these few was almost indescribable. Those who have reported the impression say it was made upon the spirit rather than upon the mind.[1] After Emerson's death Judge Hoar tries to recapture and express in words for the Massachusetts Historical Society his fellow-townsman's power as an orator which seemed to him "rare and peculiar; in its way unequalled among his contemporaries."[2]

> "The clear articulation, the ringing emphasis, the musical modulation of tone and voice, the loftiness of bearing, and the radiance of his face, all made a part of the consummate charm. When he closed the company could hardly tolerate any other speaker."[3]

In 1868 James Russell Lowell notes in his essays that "It is a singular fact that Mr. Emerson is the most steadily attractive lecturer in America."[4] All his life from the time of his graduation from Harvard Emerson wished that he might give a course in rhetoric and elocution.[5] It seems to us in retrospect that the colleges of his day missed much in not being sufficiently alert to avail themselves of this opportunity.

2. Emerson's Literary Methods

Cooke quotes a story of Curtis' concerning the Concord villagers' account of Emerson's manner of composition.

> "He has a huge manuscript book", they told him, "into which he is always recording the odds and ends of his thoughts, bits of observation and experience,

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1. Woodberry, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 61
2. Hoar, letter in Tributes of Massachusetts Historical Society to Longfellow and Emerson, p. 39
3. Ibid., p. 38
4. Lowell, Literary Essays I, p. 349
5. Cabot, Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, vol. 1, p. 72

> and facts of all kinds - a kind of intellectual, scientific scrap-bag into which left over pieces of conversation and wayside reveries are thrust, all together. After his notebooks are filled, he copies their contents into a larger Commonplace Book; then he writes at the bottom or in the margin what each paragraph is about. When he wants to write an essay he copies out all the passages about his subject and draws a line through what he has copied."[1]

This account has more accuracy in it than countrymen's tales are wont to carry. Emerson did, in general, collect material as they suggest. Early in his married life, the story goes, his wife, not yet acquainted with all his habits, woke one night to hear him moving about the room. She questioned anxiously if he were ill. "Only an idea," was the calm reply, as her spouse proceeded to jot down the inspiration.[1]

Carpenter remarks:

> "A study of the correlation between Emerson's reading lists, his journals, and his published works shows how slowly his mind worked in its creative processes. He seldom assimilated any foreign idea till he had come upon it several times. When he did find such an idea to his liking, he copied the significant outline of it into his journals, and gradually absorbed it more completely into his mind. Finally he reinterpreted it in his essays and gave it new connection and meaning."[2]

These habits of composition tell better than anything else perhaps just why it is difficult to trace accurately the influences which affect Emerson's lectures and essays. They explain, too, in part his genius in finding telling quotations and the astounding wealth of literary reference which one notes in all his works. His quotations, as many a critic has observed,

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1. Cooke, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 202
2. Carpenter, Emerson and Asia, pp. 12-13

are often as striking as the text. They go a long way, too, toward explaining the criticism which many make of all his works that there is little connection between many of the ideas which follow one another in his essays, or, if there is connection, there is almost complete lack of transition. Emerson himself was not unaware of this. "I sit and read and write with very little system," he tells Carlyle, "and as far as regards composition, with the most fragmentary result: paragraphs incomplete, each sentence an infinitely repellent particle."[1]

He liked to work out ideas in his "out-of-door study" so-called,- his woodlot on the shores of Walden Pond, where by a rocky ledge he had a wild-flower garden of his own and where he spent whole days pruning the pines, cutting paths, and opening vistas.[2] He liked to stroll and linger there on the sun-warmed brown needles. "Our thought is a pious reception", he said, and his whole attitude toward his mind and perception was distinctly religious. Albee says, "He wrote when he felt inspired; when not, he sought in right living and high thinking the renewal of the sources of inspiration."[3]

When he turned a lecture into an essay or prepared any piece of writing for the press it was not without diligent pruning and revision. He called this process giving it a Greek dress.[4] He disliked thoroughly a sentence which dragged and he hated circuitous repetition. He wanted every word to carry its

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1. quoted in Russell, Emerson, p. 7
2. Brooks, Emerson and Others, p. 99
3. Albee, Remembrances of Emerson, p. 200
4. Ibid., p. 198

full weight of meaning. After a struggle with the wordiness of some paragraphs on consistency he wrote in his journal: "My page about 'consistency' would be better written thus: Damn Consistency!"[1] Albee says, "Emerson's essays are the almost unexampled instance of matter prepared for oral delivery that has a place in permanent and vital literature."[2]

3. Emerson's Literary Friends

a. Carlyle

At the head of the list of Emerson's literary friends stands Thomas Carlyle. For a period of almost forty years they corresponded with one another, and in those last days when Emerson's memory and strength failed rapidly his eyes turned to the portrait of his Scottish friend which hung on the walls of his study and with a smile of affection he said to his wife, "That is the man, my man."[3] The modes of thought and expression of these two were almost entirely dissimilar, their temperaments sharply contrasted, yet although parted by an ever-widening cleft of difference in some views, they knew, as Carlyle said, that beneath it "the rock strata, miles deep, united again," and their two souls were as one.[4]

He became interested in Carlyle through his papers on German literature in the Edinburgh Review and the Foreign Quarterly Review about 1828 and followed his work with interest.[5]

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1. Journal, October 24, 1840
2. Albee, Remembrances of Emerson, p. 133
3. Garnett, Ralph Waldo Emerson, preface, Representative Men, p. xcix
4. Norton, editor, Carlyle-Emerson Correspondence, preface
5. Cooke, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 52

On October 1, 1832, he writes in his journal:

> "I am cheered and instructed by this paper on Corn Law Rhymes in Edinburgh by my Germanick new-light writer, whoever he be. He gives us confidence in our principles. He assures the truth-lover everywhere of sympathy. Blessed art that makes books, and so joins me to that stranger by this perfect railroad."[1]

Carlyle's powers were slowly recognized by his contemporaries and he was only at the beginning of his long, uphill climb to fame when Emerson sought him out on his way home from Europe in 1833. He dawned upon the moral solitude of the struggling young Scottish writer like "a supernal vision," as Carlyle described it afterwards.[2] His coming to Craigenputtock was "like the visit of an angel"[2] - so heart-warming was his generous sympathy and appreciation. This visit was the beginning of a friendship which lasted a lifetime. Emerson saw Carlyle again on his two other trips to Europe in 1847 and 1872; he heartily urged his friend to come to America offering him his house for an indefinite period, but Carlyle could never quite bring himself to make the long journey. Letters passed between them regularly, however. Luckily they were treasured missives on both sides of the Atlantic, and Charles Eliot Norton in two volumes and a small supplementary book gives us the Carlyle-Emerson correspondence almost in its entirety. The letters are good to read - full as they are of friendship, mutual criticism and revealing comments upon the literary world which both lived in.

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1. Journal, October 1, 1832
2. quoted in Cooke, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 34

Emerson, as I have mentioned above, edited painstakingly from magazine and manuscript nearly all of Carlyle's works in America, thus in large measure saving them from the vandalism of the cheap Press which, in the absence of an International Copyright Law (not won from Congress until 1890), played havoc with so many European books. Strangely enough America showed appreciation of Sartor Resartus before London discovered its worth.

Carlyle, on his side, lent encouragement to Emerson in those first bleak years when the little book Nature was selling so slowly. He writes in February 13, 1837:

> "Your little azure-colored Nature gave me true satisfaction. You say it is the first chapter of something greater. I call it rather the Foundation and Ground-plan on which you may build whatsoever of great and true has been given you to build....."

He it was who counselled Emerson's reading in German and awoke even that reluctant linguist to an enthusiasm for Goethe in the original.

The close friendship between the two men and the more apparent than real similarity in a few of their ideas at first led their literary contemporaries to say that Emerson was a disciple of Carlyle's. This has been repudiated by critics on both sides of the water and none the less vehement is this denial from a German critic:

> "With some who have heard his name coupled with that of Carlyle, he passes for a sort of echo or double of the English writer. (Blackwoods Mgz. 64.643 ff) -eine solche Ansicht kann heutzutage ernsthaft nicht mehr gemeint sein. Emerson ist ein durchaus selbst andiger Denker. Es ist sogar schwerer, die Punkte, in denen er sich mit Carlyle zusammen findet anzugeben, als die monumentalen Unterschiede zwischen diesen beiden

Denkern festzustellen."[1]

b. Thoreau

Perhaps next in degree of intimacy comes Emerson's friendship with the staunch young individualist author of his own home-town, Henry David Thoreau.

Emerson had probably heard reports of Thoreau in Concord village talk, and had personally helped him in getting pecuniary aid at Harvard upon the recommendation of Dr. Ripley, but he never became acquainted with him in any close sense until the year Thoreau graduated from college. It happened that Thoreau's sister Helen was visiting Emerson's house with some friends and the talk had turned to a discussion of self-reliance. Emerson had no sooner given his viewpoint upon the subject when Helen uttered an exclamation. "Why, my brother Henry has a passage almost exactly that in one of his diaries!" Emerson, who like his Aunt Mary enjoyed young people of promise, sent an invitation to the young man that he come and visit him.[2] Henry did so, and the two found common ground in thought which gradually ripened into a friendship. On February 17, 1838, occurs the first entry in Emerson's diary regarding him:

> "My good Henry Thoreau made this else solitary afternoon sunny with his simplicity and clear perception. How comic is simplicity in this double-dealing, quacking world! Everything that boy says makes merry with society, tho' nothing could be graver than his meaning. I told him he should write out the history of his college life, as

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1. Wiecki, Carlyle's "Helden" und Emerson's Repraesentanten, p. 53
2. Sanborn, Henry David Thoreau, p. 21

> Carlyle has of his tutoring. We agreed that the seeing the stars through a telescope would be worth all the astronomical lectures."

Just how much Emerson's life, lectures, or book on Nature had influenced Thoreau's thinking in the Harvard years is a matter of conjecture. Certainly they were all of the sort which would naturally appeal to him. But, however much unconsciously they may have colored his ideas, Henry Thoreau had too much sturdy independence of his own to be a conscious imitator of any one, then or later in the years of close association.

In the next few years Henry's name is a common occurrence in Emerson's journals. Henry had sent the philosopher his poem on Sympathy which the latter praises as "the purest strain and the loftiest thought which has yet pealed from this unpoetic American forest."[1] Emerson's love for walking in Concord woods was enhanced under Thoreau's skilful guidance and knowledge of Nature. Emerson records that Henry thought he could tell by the flowers what day of the month it was, at least within two days.[2]

From 1841 to 1843 Thoreau lived at Emerson's house working as a sort of guest assistant gardener and doing all sorts of odd jobs which he thoroughly enjoyed and for which Emerson had little aptitude. A letter from Emerson to Carlyle in 1841 records:[3]

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1. Emerson, Journal, August 1, 1839
2. Emerson, Journal, May 21, 1857
3. Carlyle-Emerson Correspondence, vol. 1

> "One reader and friend of yours dwells now in my house, and, as I hope, for a twelve-month to come,- Henry Thoreau,- a poet whom you may one day be proud of,- a noble, manly youth, full of melodies and inventions. We work together day by day in my garden, and I grow well and strong."

In 1842 we find in Thoreau's diary a comparison between Emerson and Carlyle and so, incidentally, Emerson's meaning to Thoreau. Emerson's field seemed to Thoreau a higher one than Carlyle's, albeit his talent was not so conspicuous. Emerson's affections and intellect were equally developed. He had advanced farther than Carlyle, had seen a new heavens open. His was the life of an artist, having more variation, finer perception. He was not so robust or elastic, but practical enough in his own field, and a faithful judge of men. Nowhere was there such a general critic of men and things - no such trustworthy and faithful man. There was more of the divine realized in him than in any other.[1] A friend for any young Transcendentalist to be proud of.

As for Emerson, he was his own man more than most, yet it seemed to him that something would be lacking in his life without Thoreau[2] who gave flesh and blood and vigor to Emerson's own system of ethics, reflected back to him his own largesse - and so fulfilled Emerson's own definition[3] of the office of friend as one who makes us do what we can, by showing to him his resources and meeting his challenge.

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1. Thoreau, Journal, 1842 undated, Shepard, pp. 45-46
2. Emerson, Journal, 1852
3. Emerson, Considerations by the Way, Social Aims

c. Alcott

Amos Bronson Alcott was also a frequent visitor at the Emerson household. He was the pure idealist, the quintessence of Transcendentalism whose impracticality and vagueness Emerson often despaired of, but he loved him none the less. Honore Willsie Morrow has written an interesting popular account of him in The Father of Little Women. His ideas on education were radical in his day - they were his favorite contribution to the transcendentalist social reforms of his day.

Alcott went to England in 1842 in search of great men and new fountains of idealism. Carlyle, to whom Emerson presents him by letter, writes his friend in Concord:

> 19 July, 1842
>
> "He is a genial, innocent, simple-hearted man, of much natural intelligence and goodness, with an air of rusticity, veracity, and dignity withal, which in many ways appeals to one. The good Alcott: with his long, lean face and figure, with his gray worn temples and mild radiant eyes: all bent on saving the world by a return to acorns and the golden age; he comes before one like a kind of venerable Don Quixote, whom nobody can even laugh at without loving!"

to which Emerson replies:

> 15 October, 1842
>
> "He is a great man and was made for what is greatest, but I now fear that he has already touched what best he can, and through his more than a prophet's egotism, and the absence of all useful reconciling talents, will bring nothing to pass, and be but a voice in the wilderness. As you do not seem to have seen in him his pure and noble intellect, I fear that it lies under some new and denser clouds."

Alcott returns, brimful of hope, with Charles Lane, a fellow-idealist, to start an ideal community in the town of Harvard near Concord which he called Fruitlands where no

animal food, tea, or coffee was to be had and the bread was of unbolted flour.[1] From the first its founders' lack of business sense doomed it to failure.

Emerson, ever the generous friend, offered the Alcotts, husband, wife, and four children, his own household as a ground for experiment in one of those periods when the father of the family's ideas had been particularly unremunerative, but luckily for the peace of all concerned, Mrs. Alcott had the good taste to refuse the invitation.

Phillips Russell has an amusing, somewhat fanciful account of a typical afternoon walk of the two friends:

> "Emerson was often joined on his woodland ramble by Bronson Alcott, then teaching a novel kind of school in Boston. On a pleasant afternoon they would start out briskly and get as far as the first fence, where Alcott, who meantime had been reminded of an absorbing topic, would pause and make one more point before they climbed over. It could not always be disposed of in a mere five minutes, and Alcott would lean his back against the fence or sit down while Emerson furtively gazed around at the clouds or at the meeting of the land and sky which formed a line he always loved to contemplate. Higher and higher would rise the flood of Alcott's talk, filling Emerson's ears and pounding on his head like surf. The passage of an hour, two hours, would find the two men still standing on the hither side of the fence, Alcott still talking to Emerson gazing wistfully over at the fields which he was not to cross that day. Slowly they would return to the house for supper, Alcott to look up an authority among his host's books and Emerson to creep off to his bedroom where he would throw himself down grateful for the enclosing darkness and for the poultice of silence."[2]

In Emerson Alcott found an understanding friend and it

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1. Brooks, Emerson and Others, p. 53
2. Russell, Emerson, p. 138

is probable that he never suspected that Emerson sometimes thought of him as "a tedious archangel." Alcott sent Emerson his book on Education characteristically called Psyche in manuscript. Emerson praised its power to "waken the absolute" but sighed over its "want of compression."[1] "You are tempted to linger around the idea in the hope that what cannot be stated in a few words may be suggested by many"- he wrote.[1] Here are his corrections of the Alcottean phraseology:

*A. "seraphic life of the spirit"
E. We can hardly be too frugal with words of this kind.
A. "I would shadow forth truth not only to thy head..."
E. Say vaticate or embody and eye and ear.
A. Spirituality
E. I think we should leave spirituality to the Unitarian Association.[1]

*A. = Alcott E. = Emerson

Alcott believed the world needed his message, as did so many others of this reforming, transcendental age - and although he was a visionary, Emerson and a few of his friends believed that there was essential worth in his ideas and that his lectures should be supported. Louisa May Alcott, the second daughter, who afterwards achieved a literary reputation in her own right, notes in her diary of January, 1861:

> "Father had four talks at Emerson's; good people came, and he enjoyed them much; made thirty dollars. R. W. E. probably put in twenty dollars. He has a sweet way of bestowing gifts on table under a book or behind a candle-stick when he thinks Father wants a little money, and no one will help him earn."[2]

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1. Russell, Emerson, pp. 141-142
2. Alcott, L., Life, Letters, and Journals, p. 124

And at the time of Emerson's death she writes:

> Thursday, April 27, 1882
>
> "Mr. Emerson died at 9 P.M. suddenly. Our best and greatest American gone. The nearest and dearest friend Father has ever had, and the man who has helped me most by his life, his books, his society. I can never tell all he has been to me,- from the time I sang Mignon's song under his window (a little girl) and wrote letters à la Bettine to him, my Goethe, at fifteen, up through my hard years when his essays on Self-Reliance, Character, Compensation, Love, and Friendship helped me to understand myself and life and God and Nature."

Emerson could appreciate the ridiculousness of some of Alcott's idealism, but none the less he valued him truly. In the days toward the end of his life when his journal entries grow fewer and fewer, there appears a list of names labelled My Men and Alcott's name is among the chosen.[1]

d. Others

These three I have chosen as the literary men of the time whom Emerson knew best; but there are many other names of literary acquaintances without which the roll-call could not pretend to be complete.

In America there was Margaret Fuller, editor of the Dial, one of the most intelligent and well-educated women of her day, a critic of literature, art, and music, an accomplished linguist, and an advocate of women's rights. Hers was a strange, restless, warm, impulsive nature. From the first she

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1. Journal, June, 1871

desires to make Emerson her master. From him, she told someone afterwards, "I first learned what is meant by an inward life."[1] She volunteered to teach him to speak German, she took portfolios of pictures to his house that she might teach him more about art. He writes to his brother William after the first acquaintance:

> Concord, August 8, 1836
> "An accomplished lady is staying with Lidian (his wife) now, Miss Margaret Fuller. She is quite an extraordinary person for her apprehensiveness, her acquisitions, and her power of conversation."[2]

Yet their two natures were diverse and baffling to one another. He writes in his journal five years later:

> October 12
> "I would that I could... I know afar off that I cannot, give the lights and shades, the hopes and outlooks that come to me in these strange, cold-warm attractive-repelling conversations with Margaret, whom I always admire, most revere when I nearest see, and sometimes love,- yet whom I freeze, and who freezes me to silence, when we seem to promise to come nearest."[3]

There was Sampson Reed of whom we have spoken above. He, too, is listed under My Men in the Journal of 1871.

There was young Ellery Channing with whom he had some of his most enjoyable walks, who had the soul of a poet and yet whose poems seemed an imperfect expression of the genius Emerson sensed in him. Emerson introduced his poetry to the public in the first number of the Dial with high praise for the author.[4] He sends a later published small book of Ellery's poems to

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1. Ames, Memorial Address, Ralph Waldo Emerson, pp. 7 and 8
2. quoted in Cabot, Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, vol. 1, pp. 274-275
3. Journal, October 12, 1841
4. Cooke, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 234

England, forecasting somewhat dubiously, "I love Ellery so much as to have persuaded myself long since that he is a true poet, if these lines should not show it."[1]

Jones Very, the eccentric Salem poet, was also known to Emerson and published his Essays and Poems in 1839.[2] His transcendentalism was of the most literal. He wrote to Emerson in sending him some of his work: "You hear not mine own words, but the teaching of the Holy Ghost."[3]

Hawthorne, Emerson's near neighbor, he could never quite appreciate. Hawthorne's weird stories seemed valueless to Emerson; but the man he believed greater than his works. He took one long walking trip with the creator of the Old Manse and the Pyncheons and they talked at length; but Hawthorne's funeral finds Emerson writing in his journal:

> "I thought.....that he might one day show a purer power. Moreover, I have felt sure of him in his neighborhood, and in his necessities of sympathy and intelligence,- that I could well wait his time,- his unwillingness and caprice,- and might one day conquer a friendship.....It was easy to talk to him - only, he said so little, that I talked too much.....now it appears I waited too long."[4]

Longfellow was his favorite table companion at the Saturday Club sessions. When his memory was failing he attended the Cambridge poet's funeral and looked down at the peaceful dead face. "The gentlemen who lies here was a beautiful soul," he said, "but I have forgotten his name."[5]

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1. Sterling-Emerson correspondence, October 11, 1843
2. Cabot, Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, vol. 1, p. 352
3. quoted in Gray, Emerson, p. 99
4. Journal, May 24, 1864
5. Garnett, Ralph Waldo Emerson, preface, Representative Men, p. xciii

He said of Oliver Wendell Holmes to a young lad he was talking books with:

> "The connecting link between England and America is Oliver Wendell Holmes.....He has the finest sensibility, and that catholicity of taste without which no large and generous nature can be developed. Everything interests him. He has phases which make him welcome to Bacchus as Minerva."[1]

Of Lowell he said to the same boy, "He is a man of wit; a genial man of good inspirations who can write poems of wit and something better."[1] But, says, Woodberry, and truly, "The threads of their lives crossed in a purely temporal way and without importance; he had no true touch with Longfellow or Holmes or Lowell any more than with Hawthorne and Whittier, nor did he value their literary performance highly."[2]

Emerson wrote to Walt Whitman in 1855:

> "I am not blind to the worth of the wonderful gift of Leaves of Grass. I find it the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed. I am very happy in reading it, as great power makes us happy. It meets the demand I am always making of what seemed the sterile and stingy nature, as if too much handiwork, or too much lymph in the temperament, were making our Western wits fat and mean.
>
> I give you joy of your free and brave thought. I have great joy in it. I find incomparable things said incomparably well, as they must be. I find the courage of treatment which so delights us, and which large perception only can inspire.
>
> I greet you at the beginning of a great career, which yet must have a long foreground somewhere, for such a start. I rubbed my eyes a little, to see if this sunbeam were no illusion; but the solid sense of the book is a sober certainty. It has the best merits, namely of fortifying and encouraging.

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1. Woodbury, Talks with Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 62
2. Woodberry, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 98

> I did not know until I last night saw the book advertised in a newspaper that I could trust the name as real and available for a post-office. I wish to see my benefactor, and have felt much like striking my tasks and visiting New York to pay you my respects."[1]

Whitman chose from this private letter the words,"I greet you at the beginning of a great career" and printed them on the cover of his book. This lack of taste on Whitman's part and the sensuality which Emerson found in some of the later poems went a long way toward qualifying the admiration which he had felt for the first promise of power.[2] He writes Carlyle the following year:

> "One book last summer came out in New York, a nondescript monster which yet had terrible eyes and buffalo strength, and was indisputably American,- which I thought I ought to send you..... It is called Leaves of Grass.....and after you have looked into it if you think, as you may, that it is only an auctioneer's inventory of a warehouse, you can light your pipe with it."[3]

In longer retrospect, seven years later he comments in his journal:

> "One must thank Walt Whitman for service to American literature in the Appalachian enlargement of his outline and treatment."[4]

But there is no evidence that the two men ever really came to know one another. I have listed above his associates in the Transcendentalist Club and the Saturday Club.

As with American authors, so it was with contemporary literary men in England.....with very few exceptions they

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1. Cooke, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 233
2. Ibid., p. 234
3. Carlyle-Emerson correspondence, May 6, 1856
4. Journal, October, 1863

interested him but did not further attract him. During his visits to Europe he met Leigh Hunt, Landor, De Quincy, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Tennyson, and Arthur Hugh Clough, who afterwards made a brief visit to Concord. He corresponded for some time with John Sterling, a poet friend of Carlyle's, and was entertained by Alexander Ireland who became manager of the lectures he gave in London, Edinburgh, and many provincial towns on the second trip to the Old World.

Hermann Grimm came across a book of Emerson's Essays lying upon the table of an American friend. Trusting to his really good knowledge of the English language he picked it up and began to read, but could make nothing of it. He inquired concerning the author and learned that he had a high reputation as a character and as a prose writer. He picked it up again. At first it was hard going; then:

> "Einige Sätze sprangen mir so leuchtend in die Seele, dasz ich eine Art Trieb empfand es einzustecken und zu Hause genauer auzusehen."[1]

At his house he took out his Webster's dictionary to explore further and the fascination grew:

> "Ich hielt es nicht für möglich, dasz ich mich so gesangen gegehen hatte, ich schien mir getäuscht und betrogen, ich sagte mir: dieser Mensch wird ein Mensch sein wie alle andern.....und wenn ich dann wieder seine Sätze las, flog die zauberische Luft über mein iherz von neuen, es erfrischte sich das alte abgearbeitete Getriebe der Welt, als hätte ich niemals so reine Luft gekostet."[2]

He wrote Emerson a letter to express his appreciation and a correspondence began which lasted some years. It has been

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1. Grimm, Fünfzehn Essays, p. 426
2. Ibid., pp. 430-431

edited by Frederick William Hollis and was published in the early part of this century.

But these names do not tell half the story.

> "The guests of that friendly rooftree were of every conceivable variety. Some of them were mere 'devastators of the day'; some, like Margaret Fuller, and the homeless Alcotts, stayed for weeks, and Emerson actually invited Thomas and Jane Carlyle to come over and share his home. Sometimes the guests were only mildly insane, like the Englishmen Lane and Wright; or they might be intermittently insane like Jones Very; or men of one idea, like Garrison and John Brown and Walt Whitman; or men of too many ideas, like Theodore Parker and Charles Sumner. In Hawthorne's Mosses from an Old Manse there is a matchless description of these strange visionaries and theorists. Hundreds of sufferers from maladjustment and spiritual depression came to Emerson for counsel, as men and women at a later period went to Dr. Weir Mitchell or to Dr. Riggs. Hundreds more,- students, teachers, clergymen, journalists, reformers,- wrote him long letters asking for advice. The Emerson house was a cure for souls,- except that many of these souls were incurable."[1]

Expecially did he attract the young people. Albee says,

> "Concord became a university to many young men.....It made the little scholarship at Cambridge insignificant.[2].....It was the place of exchange for all the best things then being written or said, on which you might hear Thoreau's laconic summation, Alcott's genial comment and rendering into the Orphic philosophy, or Emerson's wise and conciliatory interpretation."[3]

Emerson himself said in a letter to Elizabeth Peabody: "My special parish is young men inquiring their way in life." He wrote from England to Elizabeth Hoar, "I have.....some

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1. Perry, Emerson Today, p. 53
2. Albee, Remembrances of Emerson, p. 59
3. Ibid., p. 61

youthful correspondents - you know my failing - friendly young gentlemen, in different parts of Britain."[1] His son reports that he wrote in the hope of saying something of value to "the good boys" and that he gave to those who asked advice two rules "Room alone" and "Keep a journal."[2] "His manner toward young men", says Albee, "was wonderfully flattering; it was a manner I know no other word for but expectancy."[3] Louisa May Alcott writes an affectionate account of his hospitality:

> "When the book mania fell upon me at fifteen I used to venture into Mr. Emerson's library and ask what I should read, never conscious of the audacity of my demand so genial was my welcome. His kind hand opened for me the riches of Shakespeare, Dante, Goethe, and Carlyle; and I gratefully recall the sweet patience with which he led me around the book-lined room, till 'the new and interesting book' was found or the indulgent smile he wore when I proposed something far above my comprehension. 'Wait a little for that,' he said, 'Meantime try this, and if you like it, come again.' For many of these wise books I am waiting still, very patiently, because in his own I have found the truest delight, the best inspiration of my life."[4]

So did Emerson become the prophet of young men in the restless period of the decades preceding the Civil War.

4. Emerson's Books

There were strange companions in Emerson's book-lined study: Montaigne, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Swedenborg, Plutarch, Goethe, and Byron near Dante, Plato, Homer, George Sand, the Bibles of the World, George Herbert, and John Milton, Carlyle

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1. Woodbury, Talks with Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 13
2. Emerson, Edward, Ralph Waldo Emerson address, p. 47
3. Albee, Remembrances of Emerson, p. 84
4. quoted in Conway, Emerson at Home and Abroad, p. 41

was there within easy reach of the armchair, Landor, Wordsworth, and Tennyson. Ben Jonson likewise held a favored corner. There were some of Scott's novels, a copy of Manzoni's I Promessi Sposi; a good many of the seventeenth century divines, histories, and surveys of philosophy. There were slim volumes of young men and women just making their start in the literary world with his encouragment; poems of Jones Very and Ellery Channing, Louisa May Alcott's first collection of short stories, Walt Whitman's Leaves of Grass, Thoreau's Walden. He had, too, a smattering of the books of his older countrymen contemporaries: Bryant, Lowell, Longfellow, Holmes, Hawthorne, Cooper, and Poe. He saved treasured volumes of The North American Review, The Dial, Fraser's, Blackwoods, The Quarterly, The London Review, and the Revue des Deux Mondes. A sunny room of hospitable disorder .....where one might talk with the master of the house and borrow books from him.

Emerson was a wide and miscellaneous reader. He browsed around the world of books, tasting here and there, reading intensively in the types which appealed to him. At Carlyle's encouragment he had read all of Goethe in the original, but apart from that he made little use of the German tongue and had no first-hand acquaintance with German philosophy. He read from George Sand and Sainte-Beuve in the French, but on the whole did not care for that language or the literature written in it. For the most part he sought translations for foreign books and recommended them to those who sought his advice.

In general, says Woodberry, he read two kinds of books:

"biography, - anecdotes, and certain kinds of travel and science; and secondly, books of philosophy and old religion, generally mystical."[1] He believed it was an economy of time to read old and famed books; "Classics, as nature, reveal to us our real selves."[2] And yet, no passive reverence for them will do. Great men have existed that there may be greater men.[3] In the Phi Beta Kappa address he warns the young men of his audience that the source of truth is not in books, but in mental-activity and self-trust. In the fulness of all natural law lies all absolute greatness received by men of all ages in the degree with which they were guided by their own genius. These men by their words and lives can bring us by their words and lives into a closer communication with the Source, but our individual power is new in nature[3] and may be even greater than theirs. Says John Morley: "His books were for spiritual use, like maps and charts of the mind of man."[4]

He read in his own way, often becoming preoccupied with the style or expression. He had an eye for the good sentences and took down numerous quotations for further use. He advises a similar procedure to one of his youthful disciples:

> "Reading long at one time anything, no matter how it fascinates, destroys thought as completely as the inflections forced by external causes. Do not permit this. Stop if you find yourself becoming absorbed at even the first paragraph. Keep yourself out and watch for your own impressions."[5]

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1. Woodberry, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 85
2. Emerson, Self-Reliance, Essays, First Series
3. Emerson, Uses of Great Men, Representative Men
4. Morley, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 25
5. Woodbury, Talks with Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 29

In a measure, it seems he read his own text into whatever printed page he read; non-conductivity was a large element in his makeup.

Woodberry says in summary:

> "His reading was wide, but not deep; desultory, but not catholic; strange, but not learned; and it reflected the idiosyncracy of his character."[1]

5. Emerson as a Writer

Critics began discussing the nature of Emerson's worth during his lifetime and the battle is still being waged. That his contribution is of worth seems to be generally admitted, but the disagreements are many as to its kind.

It is his prose which receives the greatest attention. Although many admit that his nature is essentially poetic, most agree that his powers of execution are inferior to his imagination. Emerson himself recognized his limitations in this direction. He writes to Carlyle on the publication of his first volume of poems:

> "I printed them, not because I was deceived into a belief that they were poems, but because of the softness or hardness of heart of many friends here who have made it a point to have them circulated."[2]

Woodberry writes of him:

> "He expressed his inner life in verse; nothing is more significant than the persistance with which he continued to write it, though undistinguished and mediocre and without any mark of genius..... He was

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1. Woodberry, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 85
2. Carlyle-Emerson Correspondence, January 31, 1847

> imtimately aware of the poetic part of his nature, and early idealized it and set it apart as a higher self. 'A certain poet told me'; he was afterwards accustomed to write, and later he named him Osman; it was this poet known within. The Discontented Poet, a masque, a work begun but never completed, was self-portraiture begun in these years. He was not deceived, for he was primarily a poet, though with imperfect faculty, and had the habits of a poet, both personal and mental."[1]

Morley comments, "Taken as a whole Emerson's poetry is of that kind which springs, not from excitement of passion or feeling, but from an intellectual demand for intense and sublimated expression."[2]

Likewise nearly all the critics agree that Emerson is not a philosopher of high order. He lacks sustained intellectual vigor and system-making ability.

It is his prose that comes in for the greatest share of attention; but even here opinions differ. Matthew Arnold states the case fairly for all of them when he says,

> "I do not place Emerson among the great poets. But I go further and say I do not place him among the great writers, the great men of letters."[3]
>
> "He is not a great writer, a great philosophy-maker; he is the friend and aider of those who would live in the spirit."[4]
>
> "It is in the hopeful, serene, beautiful temper wherewith his insight and truth are indisolubly joined; in which they work, and have their being."[5] ....."Emerson's essays are the most important work in prose in the century."[6]

Appreciation of his essays has been world wide. In

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1. Woodberry, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 86
2. Morley, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 26
3. Arnold, Discourses in America, p. 159
4. Ibid., p. 179
5. Ibid., p. 193
6. Ibid., p. 196

1847 when his poems were hardly off the press M. Émile Montégut devoted thirty pages to him in the Revue des Deux Mondes.[1] Fifteen years later Grimm made him known to Germany. The Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood were admirers of his poetic idealism in the early part of his career and of course his friendship with Carlyle won him still further reputation in England. Maeterlinck, the Belgian philosopher, was influenced by him. Neitzsche came on Emerson's essays at Pforta and read them with enthusiasm. Phillips Russell remarks that, in the German philosopher's writings, there are numerous passages curiously parallel to Emerson's.[2] From Italy we have the following judgment:

> "Un grande poeta Emerson non nè è, nè un grande scienziato, nè un grande filosofo..... Emerson è un vate, un profeta antico fiorito in pieno secolo decimonono, in mezzo ad uno dei popoli più practici, operosi, industriali della terra."[3]

Emerson's value cannot be determined by literary criticism alone. John Morley says of him:

> "The step out of the past into the present, out of Theology into philosophy, out of mythology into metaphysics was taken by Emerson. He is the sole important representative of this stage in American Literature; that is his true significance. He was the incarnation of the moment of change, and by the genius of his temperament and the accident of his situation so perfectly adapted to embody and express it that his ideas seem phases of his own soul, parts of his personality."[4]

And Albee agrees in substance, I think, in the following passage:

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1. Cary, Emerson, p. 234
2. Russell, Emerson, p. 212
3. Formichi, Scienza e Fede nell' opera, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 3
4. Morley, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 62

"I think one of Emerson's chief services to his countrymen is and will continue to be disentangling the connection between forms of religion and ethics; in once more planting prostrate man upon his feet and then uplifting his eyes to the spiritual beauty and dignity of life."

Summary of Influences

I have tried to show the literary bearing of the influences which entered Emerson's life, but so much historical background has necessarily been introduced that at times it may seem to my reader that the literary thread has been lost sight of. Since an exact understanding of the relationships involved is necessary to an appreciation of Emerson's theories of literary criticism, I shall in the paragraphs which follow try to point out in summary form just what I conceive these influences to be.

In the first place Emerson's ancestry was rich in literary traditions. Although there were no outstanding authors on either side of the family, there had been able speakers who were practised in the art of effective self-expression. Emerson's childhood and young manhood were spent among scholarly people who loved good books and who encouraged his first efforts in writing. The social background of the time provided him with opportunity to become acquainted with the best in American oratory and preaching,- with men like Edward Everett, William Ellery Channing, and Daniel Webster. Although there was little outstanding in the way of American literature, there was a decided interest in literary matters and a concern that American literature might be produced. Men like Everett and George Ticknor did much in encouraging young men of literary inclination to study the classics and the best of European books.

Emerson's training for and experience in the ministry deepened his natural preference for abstractions, although it also showed him clearly his inability to carry a line of abstract reasoning through into a theological or philosophical system. He had always been interested chiefly in the moral significance of men and their actions; as a minister he formulated and gained practice in expressing his ideas of this significance. We shall see that this same interest he carries over into his literary judgments.

The trip to Europe gave Emerson his first glimpse of the art treasures of the old world and provided him with a background necessary for his views on aesthetics. This was also the beginning of his friendship with Carlyle.

The spirit of revolt which manifested itself in liberal theology, Transcendentalism, and other Perfectionist movements, found its way into Emerson's blood and made him a decided individualist. The doctrine of self-reliance is evident in all his literary theories.

The influence of Plato and the Neo-Platonists can, in the opinion of Mr. Foerster, hardly be overexaggerated, although he believes that it is possible that Mr. Harrison has done so. Emerson was an idealist by inclination and training. Although he had no deep understanding of philosophic systems, the poetry of Plato's language made an everlasting appeal to him, as did the mystical pronouncements of Plotinus. The influences of Platonism and Transcendentalism often merge in

his doctrines of the aesthetic and of creative ability, but we can hardly deny the influence of both.

The Eastern scriptures and Eastern poetry confirmed Emerson's innate mysticism. He was temperamentally suited to appreciate them. How much influence they had on his literary views beyond the few "trappings of speech" it is rather difficult to judge. I have, however, included Mr. Carpenter's view on this influence.

At the time of Emerson's maturity the chief influences were his circle of literary friends and his ever-increasing library of books. I have mentioned his native imperviousness and it is certain that the ideas which he expressed in his first book Nature were in no essential way altered to the end of his life. His friends and his books did, however, provide him with a stimulus to expand these ideas and to carry their implications further. They gave him the assurance of a literary background and an audience. He names great poetry as one of the sources of inspiration and strict conversation with a friend to be the text from which all good writing is drawn.

On the whole, although Emerson's reiterated individualism causes us to doubt the traditional importance given to many of these influences, it cannot be denied that they played some part in shaping his modes of thought, perhaps a greater one than he himself suspected.

In the section which follows I shall deal directly

with Emerson's views and leave the degree to which these backgrounds, movements, books, and men influenced Emerson to the judgment of my reader.

Part II

Emerson's Theory and Practice

of Literary Criticism

A. Esthetic Theory

There are critics who have found Emerson lacking in the esthetic sense, and some who assert that his Puritanical ancestry predetermined all he had to say on the subject. What I consider to be the measure of truth in this I shall discuss in the final section of this thesis. For the present I am concerned with Emerson's natural sensitiveness to beauty, his training in esthetic appreciation, and the esthetic theory which he developed, since it is in this theory that his doctrines of literary criticism find root.

1. Esthetic Training

The appreciation of beauty in Emerson's earliest journals is confined purely to nature, to literature, and to stylistics. This continues to be the case through the period of his graduate study and his ministry. America had little to offer him except the beauty of her natural surroundings. As we have seen in the social background sketched in the early part of this thesis, her culture was meagre in artistic values. His trip to Europe (in 1833), when he is twenty-nine years old, is really his first glimpse of the world of Art. He goes for study and with a well-founded idea of how he or anyone should judge this world of art, ignorant of its history although he apparently was. Shortly before he had written in his journal: "Good pictures in good number, an acquaintance as exhaustive as

possible of the artist and of his times, a perfect balance of spirit: here are the conditions of right judgment."[1] He wandered through the famous museums of Rome and Florence recording his personal impressions carefully at the end of each exploration. He spent long hours in ancient churches and wrote on return, "The chanting friars, the carved ceilings, the madonnas and saints, they are living oracles, quotidiana et perpetua."[2] He records himself after a visit to the Tribune and the Pitti Palace as "well-nigh 'dazzled and drunk with beauty.'"[3] Yet in retrospect, some eight years later, we find that it is the divine possibility of the human spirit so revealed that has interested him most, and that all these have served only as symbols. In his essay on Art he writes:

> "I remember when in my younger days I had heard of the wonders of Italian painting, I fancied the great pictures would be great strangers; some surprising combination of color and form; a foreign wonder, barbaric pearl and gold, like the spontoons and standards of the militia, which play such pranks in the eyes and imaginations of school-boys. I was to see and acquire I knew not what. When I came at last to Rome and saw with eyes the pictures, I found that genius left to novices the gay and fantastic and ostentatious, and itself pierced directly to the simple and true; that it was familiar and sincere; that it was the old, eternal fact I had met already in so many forms,- unto which I lived; that it was the plain you and me I knew so well,- had left at home in so many conversations. I had had the same experience already in a church at Naples. There I saw that nothing was changed with me but the place and said to myself,- 'Thou foolish child, hast thou

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1. Journal IV, p. 465
2. Journal, February, 1833
3. Journal, April 29, 1833

> come out hither, over four thousand miles of salt water, to find that which was perfect to thee there at home?' - that fact I saw again in the Academmia at Naples, in the chambers of sculpture, and yet again when I came to Rome, and to the paintings of Raphael, Angelo, Sacchi, Titian, and Leonardo da Vinci.....that which I fancied I had left at Boston was here in the Vatican and again at Milan, and at Paris, and made all traveling ridiculous as a treadmill. I now require this of all pictures, that they domesticate me, not that they dazzle me. Pictures must not be too picturesque.....The knowledge of picture-dealers has its value, but listen not to their criticism when your heart is touched by genius. It was not painted for them, it was painted for you; for such as had eyes capable of being touched by simplicity and lofty emotions."

His judgments do not follow the lines laid down by technical vocabularies; he judged primarily by the direct appeal of a work of art to the human spirit. Michaud says:

> "Il portera dans les musées le même goût, le même jugement qu'il appliquais aux paysages. Dans sa villégiature des champs, au cours d'une longue et paisible existence Emerson s'est comme saturé de la vue des formes sensibles et des objets naturels.....Il subordonne l'oeuvre d'art, comme le paysage, à des fins morales et mystiques. Dans l'art et dans la nature, il voit l'homme."[1]

His little book on Nature which he contemplated on his return ocean voyage,[2] was written in a leisurely manner after he reached home and finally published in 1836. Michaud calls the chapters on the beautiful contained in it "En dehors des manuels de philosophie scolaire.....le premier traité d'esthétique composé aux Etats-Unis."[1]

So far as Emerson's real receptivity to art was con-

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1. Michaud, Esthétique d'Emerson, p. 7
2. See Journal, September 6, 1833

cerned, this completed the period of his formal training. Margaret Fuller, an art enthusiast, made small headway with the portfolios of pictures she brought to the Emerson household, although her host was always courteous and interested. Another young friend of Emerson's who has remained anonymous in the correspondence between the two since published, was also of an artistic bent. One of Emerson's letters to him is revealing of the writer's attitude:

> October 27, 1839
>
> ".....There are fewer painters than poets. Ten men can awaken me by words to new hope and fruitful musing, for one that can achieve the miracle by forms. Besides, I think the pleasure of the poem lasts me longer. And yet the expressive arts ought to go abreast, and as much genius finds its way to light in design as in song - and probably does, so far as the artist is concerned; but the eye is a speedier student than the ear; by a grand or a lovely form it is astonished or delighted once for all and quickly appeased, whilst the sense of a verse steals slowly on the mind and suggests a hundred fine fancies before its precise import is finally settled.
>
> Or is this unjust to the noble art of design and showing that I have a hungry ear but a dull eye? I shall keep your prints a little while, if you can spare them, until I have got my lesson by heart."[1]

Whether he ever did get the lesson by heart or not, is doubtful. He had come to it at a time in life when his tastes and philosophy were pretty well formed; he was beyond the impressionable period and as we have seen above Emerson was <u>never</u> impressionable beyond a certain degree. His two esthetic enthusiasms remained to the end of his life - nature and literature. The references to painting, architecture, and sculpture

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1. <u>Letters from Ralph Waldo Emerson to a Friend</u>, Charles Eliot Norton, editor

sprinkled throughout the essays are rarely of the sort which reawaken in the reader his own experience of the object mentioned. His lists of artists seem rarely to be dictated by any chronological or emotional sense of order. He uses them, as Chapman says, only as symbols to convey some spiritual truth,[1] - although not without an effect all his own. In Chapman's judgment, "We ought not to accuse Emerson because he lacked appreciation of the fine arts, but rather admire the truly Goethean spirit in which he insisted upon the reality of arts of which he had no understanding."[2]

2. Emerson's Sensitiveness to Esthetic Principles

To speculate upon what Emerson's appreciation of the arts might have been had he had an earlier and fuller training, is in some measure futile; and yet realizing that there are principles of esthetic judgment analagous in all the arts it seems valuable to examine further his sensitivity to certain primary elements in them.

His son reports that he had a good sense of form, that he often drew heads for his children's amusement and enjoyed Greek sculpture.[3] Norman Foerster, however, looks somewhat askance at this judgment, reminding us that this sense of form seems somewhat lacking in Emerson's own writing and that in nature the only lines which he makes frequent mention of are

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1. Chapman, Emerson and Other Essays, p. 44
2. Ibid., p. 45
3. Emerson, Edward, Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 163

circles or part circles,- such as the horizon and the rainbow.[1] He prefers to stress Emerson's sensitiveness to color which the latter's son had made little of, and quotes a passage from Emerson's journal as one striking instance of this:

> "'As for beauty, I need not look beyond an oar's length for my fill of it.' says Channing."
> "'I do not know,' says Emerson, 'Whether he used the expression with design or no, but my eye rested on the charming play of light on the water which he was striking with his paddle. I fancied I had never seen such color, such transparency, such eddies; it was the hue of Rhine wines, it was jasper and verd antique, topaz and chalcedony, it was gold and green and chestnut and hazel in bewitching succession and relief, without cloud or confusion.' If anything, Emerson's eye for color was stronger than his eye for form."[2]

Equally striking seem to me Emerson's appreciation of light and shadow, his section on light as the best of painters at the beginning of the chapter on Beauty in the book Nature, for example, or a passage from the same letter to "a friend" which I have referred to above:

> "Will you let me say that I have conceived more highly of the possibilities of the art (of design) sometimes in looking at weather stains on a wall, or fantastic shapes which the eye makes out of shadows by lamplight, than from really majestic and finished pictures."

Charles Eliot Norton adds the following editor's note which seems to me particularly apt:

> "This may remind the reader of the sentences in Leonardo da Vinci's Treatise on Painting, in which he says (I translate with some abridgment):
> 'I will not omit from among these precepts one which, though it may seem small, and even to be

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1. Foerster, Emerson as a Poet of Nature, P.M.L.A., vol. 37, p. 602
2. Ibid., p. 604

> smiled at, is nevertheless of great utility in rousing the genius to various inventions, and it is this: If thou wilt look carefully at walls spotted with stains, or at stones variously mixed, thou mayst see in them similitudes of all sorts of landscapes, or figures in all sorts of actions, and infinite things which thou mayst be able to bring into complete and good form.'"[1]

For music he had no ear, and it is probable that he enjoyed the famous Miserere sung in the Sistine Chapel, which he has so long a passage about in one of his European journals,[2] more because of its religious associations than from its actual harmonies. He says that it "sounds more like the Eolian harp than anything else."[2] This was a high compliment on his part. Thoreau had placed an Eolian harp in one of the western windows at the back of the Emerson home and Emerson had been enchanted by its wind-swept melodies.[3]

He comments on this particular deficiency of his in an interesting journal entry:

> "I think sometimes that my lack of musical ear is made good to me through my eyes. That which others hear, I see. All the soothing, plaintive, brisk, or romantic moods which corresponding melodies waken in them, I find in the carpet of the wood, in the margin of the pond, in the shade of the hemlock grove, or in the infinite variety and rapid dance of the treetops as I hurry along."[4]

A later passage seems remarkably sensitive to me - on the tone in poetry:

> "In poetry, tone.....the uncontrollable interior impulse which is the authentic mark of

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1. Norton, editor, Letters from Ralph Waldo Emerson to a Friend, p. 14
2. Journal, April 3, 1833
3. Brooks, Emerson and Others, pp. 3 and 4
4. Journal, April, 1850

> a new poem, and which is unanalyzable, and makes the merit of an ode of Collins, or Gray, or Wordsworth, or Herbert, or Byron,- and which is felt in the pervading tone, rather than in brilliant parts or lines; as if the sound of a bell, or a certain cadence expressed in a low whistle or booming, or humming, to which the poet first timed his step, as he looked at the sunset, or thought, was the incipient form of the piece, and was regnant through the whole."[1]

To rhythm in its larger aspects no one who has known the magnificently rounded sentences which recur in Emerson's essays could call him insensitive. Oratory - the sound of a good style rang in his ears in that Sophoclean hour of his childhood. Channing and Everett and Buckminster were his schoolboy idols; and although he was not long in preferring a simpler style than their elaborate tropes permitted, their rhythm had been absorbed into his blood. He writes in his journal on January 1854:

> "I amuse myself often, as I walk, with humming the rhythm of the decasyllabic quatrain.....or other rhythms.....I find a wonderful charm, heroic, and especially deeply pathetic or plaintive in cadences, and say to myself 'Ah, happy! If one could fill these small measures with words approaching to the power of these beats!'"

Yet Emerson's poetry is often defective in just this respect. It was the inner rhythm and the necessity for the right word which dictated his poems - and unlike his prose works he rarely revised them, preferring to let them stand as he had first heard them. He realized the defect himself but not sufficiently to keep him from being slightly scornful of the apparent facility of Poe's "jingles" and Tennyson's capacity

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1. Journal, December 9, 1868

to be a veritable "music-box". The smaller niceties of rhythmic design often, although not always, escaped him.

The esthetic principle of unity and variety is innate in Emerson's philosophy. All the endless variety of things in us, he believed, hasten back to unity.

> "A leaf, a drop, a crystal, a moment of time is related to the whole, and partakes of the perfection of the whole. Each particle is a microcosm and faithfully renders the likeness of the world."[1]

In 1833 he encloses a quotation from Goethe in a journal passage of comment on this principle: "He who does the best in each one thing he does, does all, for he sees the connexion between all good things."[2] And yet because this Beauty which we try to express is too great for any single comprehension it must be expressed in an infinite variety of forms which are suggested by nature and experience. Every symbol thus used suggests at the same time a particular and a universal meaning.

3. His Esthetic Theory

a. The Nature of Beauty

Emerson's theory of esthetics is founded upon the dualistic world which he outlines in his book on Nature and he distinguishes three different orders of Beauty.

First of all - Natural Beauty, - the beauty of Nature which exists all about us. This is primary and as we shall see - comes to be a standard of reference. The material world

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1. Emerson, Nature, section on Discipline
2. Journal, June 10, 1833

proceeds from the same spirit as does man's body; it is a remoter and inferior incarnation of God and differs from man in that it is not now subjected to a human will.[1] Its serene order is inviolable by us: therefore it is the present expositor of the Divine Mind,- a fixed point whereby we measure our departure from divinity.[1] This world of nature is a symbol of spirit. It is God's language to us which we understand only by making ourselves passive, by exercising that elemental power of instinct and intuition which we are seldom conscious of, but which is superior to the will. It is only in this state that we see truly.[2]

The glimpses of truth we gain by this yielding of ourselves to the Over-Soul, or spiritual power behind the material universe, we express, in turn using bits of the world of nature as symbolic language, in new wholes, fashioning the second form of Beauty which Emerson names for us:- the Beauty of Art.[3] Certain minds come into close harmony with nature, "possess the power of abstracting Beauty from things and reproducing it in new forms on any object to which accident may determine their activity; as stone, canvas, song, history."[4] These are the artists. "Art is nature passed through the alembic of a man."[5]

He rejects Plato's theory of imitation for Plotinus'

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1. Emerson, Nature, section on Spirit
2. Ibid., section on Prospects
3. Ibid., sections on Language and Beauty
4. Emerson, Natural History of the Intellect, Michael Angelo
5. Emerson, Essays, First and Second Series, Art

and says,

> "In our fine arts, not imitation but creation is the aim. In landscapes the painter should give the suggestion of a fairer creation than we know. The details, the prose of nature he should omit, and give us only the spirit and splendour."[1]

There is beauty in all the language of the Over-Soul, but we have not the eyes to see it; insofar as we have wrongly used our human wills without reference to intuitions of higher reality we have become blind and nature wears the colors of our spirits.[2] Historically viewed it has been and is the office of art to educate the perception of beauty.[1] It detaches from the embarrassing variety of objects one thing[1] seen from one aspect and teaches us how this reflects the beauty of the whole. We are made aware once more of the instant dependence of form upon soul.[3] It opens our eyes to the possibility of wholeness and beauty in things which heretofore had seemed prosaic. Emerson writes in his journal on September 18, 1838:

> "Is not the beauty that piques us in every object, in a straw, an old nail, a cobblestone in the road, the announcement that always our road lies <u>out</u> into nature, and not inward to the wearisome, odious anatomy of ourselves and comparison of me with thee, and accusation of me, and ambition to take this from thee and add it to me?"

All the highest works of art are universally intelligible; "they restore to us the simplest states of mind; and are religious."[1] And yet the arts as we know them are only initial

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1. Emerson, <u>Essays</u>, <u>First and Second Series</u>, <u>Art</u>
2. Emerson, <u>Nature</u>, Introduction, Chapter I
3. Emerson, <u>Essays, First and Second Series</u>, <u>The Poet</u>

and our highest praise is given to what they aim at and promise rather than to what they actually result in.[1]

It is but a mean appreciation of man's innate worth which claims the best age of production to have been in the past.[1]

> "All literature is yet to be written. Poetry has scarce chanted its first song. The perpetual admonition of nature is 'The world is new, untried. Do not believe the past. I give you the universe virgin today.'"[2]

> "Whilst I read the poets," says Emerson, "I think that nothing new can be said about morning and evening. But when I see the daybreak, I am not reminded of these Homeric, or Shakespearean or Miltonic, or Chaucerian pictures. No; but I feel perhaps the pain of our alien world; a world not yet subdued by the thought."[2]

This promise of the arts which is greater than their actuality is the third and highest type of Beauty in Emerson's system,- Moral Beauty.

> "There is a higher work for Art than the arts. They are abortive births of an imperfect or vitiated instinct. Art is the need to create; but in its essence, immense and universal, it is impatient of working with lame and tied hands, and of making cripples and monsters, such as all pictures and statues are. Nothing less than the creation of man and nature is its end."[1]

The beauty in nature, however well perceived or understood in works of art, is not ultimate; it is but a herald of inward and eternal beauty.[3] There is no art in which one does not find the element of the biographical. "Those who painted angels and nativities and descents from the cross, were also writing biographies and satires, though they knew it not."[4]

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1. Emerson, Essays, First and Second Series, Art
2. Emerson, Nature, Addresses, and Lectures, Literary Ethics
3. Emerson, Nature, section on Beauty
4. Journal, May, 1854

Art is a prophesy of greater work and strangely its purpose is the destruction of its own separate and contrasted existence, the carrying up of itself into the kingdom of nature.[1] For the man who has grown beautiful in character through his contemplation of the beautiful in nature which he has in turn learned to see through his contemplation of art, needs art no longer and has reached that point of communion with the Over-Soul where he may have dominion over nature and share in its creation.[2] Emerson writes in his journal of July 10, 1841:

> "You shall not love beautiful objects ardently: you will not if you are beautiful. He who is enamoured of a statue, a picture, or a tune, or even of the stars and the ocean, finds in them some contrast to his own life. His own life is ugly, and he sickly prefers some marble Antinous or Cupid to the living images of his mother and father and whole towns of his countrymen dwelling around him. But when a man's life is concordant with Nature, he will behold all that is most beautiful in the universe with a fraternal regard unsurprised."

To achieve this end Beauty must not be sought for pleasure alone; but from religion and love.[1] Science must forget its pride in and thirst for power; only when its errands are noble and adequate will its strength appear supplementary and continuous to the material creation. Then beauty will be rediscovered in the useful arts.[1] (i.e. "not only those that lie next to instinct, as agriculture, building, weaving, etc., but also navigation, practical chemistry.....language, the watch, the ship, the decimal cipher.....the sciences so far as

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1. Emerson, Essays, First and Second Series, Art
2. Emerson, Nature, Prospects

they are made serviceable to political economy.")[1]

> "The love of beauty which never passes beyond outline and color is too slight an object to occupy the powers of genius. There is a closer relation than is commonly thought between the fine arts and the useful arts; and it is an essential fact in the history of Michael Angelo that his love of beauty is made solid and perfect by his deep understanding of the mechanic arts."[2]

When science is learned in love and its powers wielded in love - the distinction between these two branches of art can be forgotten in the comprehension of a larger world. Then will a revolution of things attend the influx of spirit; spirit will remake the world reenacting the ages of miracle before our eyes.[3] "The kingdom of man over nature, which cometh not with observation,- a dominion such as now is beyond his dream of God,- he shall enter without more wonder than the blind man feels who is gradually restored to perfect sight."[3]

Having given Emerson's analysis of Beauty, let us turn to some of his further definitions of it as it appears in art:

> "We ascribe beauty to that which is simple; which has no superfluous parts; which exactly answers its ends; which stands related to all things; which is the mean of many extremes..... Beauty is a pilot of the young soul.....Beauty must be organic; outside embellishment is deformity.....Nothing interests us which is stark or bounded, but only what streams with life, what is an act or endeavor to reach somewhat beyond... Beauty is the moment of transition, as if the form were just ready to flow into other forms.... Beauty rests on necessities. The line of beauty is the result of perfect economy.....Veracity

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1. Emerson, Society and Solitude, Art
2. Emerson, Natural History of the Intellect, Michael Angelo
3. Emerson, Nature, section on Prospects

> first of all and forever.....Beauty is that quality which makes to endure.....The felicities of design in art, or in the works of Nature, are shadows or forerunners of that beauty which reaches its perfection in the human form..... That beauty is the normal state is shown by the perpetual effort of Nature to attain it.....All high beauty has a moral element in it."[1]

b. The Meaning of Beauty

But what - to carry the question still further - is the place of Beauty in the scheme of things? In its largest and profoundest sense it is one expression of the universe. "Truth, and goodness, and beauty, are but different faces of the same All."[2] Our delight in a work of art rises from the fact that in it we recognize that mind which formed nature again in active operation.[3] It is the form under which intellect prefers to study the world.[1]

> "Nothing is arbitrary, nothing is insulated in Beauty.....It is the past restored; the fear is taken out of it. It is eviscerated of care; it is offered merely to contemplation as a part of the universe of God. What is addressed to us for contemplation does not threaten us, but makes us intellectual beings, and appeals to the Caticinating Reason and asks whether the object be agreeable to the preëxistent harmonies."[4]

Led thus into a clearer seeing of the beauty which is in nature and above all in the character of our fellowmen, we are brought face to face with God.

c. The Esthetic Standard

The standards which we apply when we judge the beauty

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1. Emerson, Conduct of Life, Beauty
2. Emerson, Nature, section on Beauty
3. Emerson, Society and Solitude, Art
4. Journal, September 27, 1836

of a given object is "the entire circuit of natural forms, the totality of nature, that which the Italians expressed by defining beauty 'il pui nell' uno'. Nothing is quite beautiful alone: nothing but is beautiful in the whole. A single object is only so far beautiful as it suggests this universal grace."[1] "Art in the artists is proportion or a habitual respect to the whole by an eye loving beauty in details."[2]

d. Particular Esthetic Problems

Emerson touches but briefly upon the esthetic problems of the tragic, the comic, and the grotesque; but his remarks upon them seem worthy of summarization.

(1) The Grotesque

The grotesque he gives scant attention, for he believes that the divine necessity which through nature tyrannizes over the creation of Art grinds to powder all such as do not conform to her law; "nothing droll, nothing whimsical, will endure."[3] He reiterates in a journal entry of May 28, 1836:

> "Nothing bizarre, nothing whimsical will endure. Nature is ever interfering with Art.....Every violation, every suicide, every miracle, every wilfulness, however large it may show near us, melts quickly into the All and at a distance is not seen. The outline is as smooth as the curve of the moon."

(2) The Comic

His theory of the comic is discussed most fully in an essay on this subject in Letters and Social Aims from which the

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1. Emerson, Nature, section on Beauty
2. Emerson, Essays, First and Second Series, Nominalist and Realist
3. Emerson, Society and Solitude, Art

following is an abstract:

> "The essence of all jokes, of all comedy, seems to be an honest or well-intended halfness; a non-performance of what is pretended to be performed, at the same time that one is giving loud pledges of performance.....The balking of the intellect, the frustrated expectation, the break of continuity in the intellect, is comedy; and it announces itself physically in the pleasant spasm we call laughter. .....Separate any part of nature and attempt to look at it as a whole by itself, and the feeling of the ridiculous begins. The perpetual game of humour is to look at a mouse comparing it with the eternal Whole; enjoying the figure which each self-satisfied creature cuts in the unsuspecting All, and dismissing it with a benison.....The presence of the ideal of right and truth in all action makes the yawning delinquincies of practice remorseful to the conscience, tragic to the interest, but droll to the intellect.
> ....The perception of the Comic is a tie of sympathy with other men, a pledge of sanity, and a protection from those perverse tendencies and gloomy insanities in which fine intellects sometimes lose themselves...
> We must learn by laughter, as well as by tears and terrors; explore the whole of nature, the farce and buffoonery in the yard below, as well as the lessons of poets and philosophers upstairs in the hall, and get the rest and refreshment of the shaking of the sides."

(3) <u>The Tragic</u>

In a September 20, 1839, journal entry we find Emerson pondering the problem that "children like the story that makes them weep better than the one that makes them laugh. Men love the play, or the fight, or the news that scares or agitates them. And the great man loves the conversation or the book that convicts him; not that which soothes and flatters him." And he concludes that such a strange fact is so because "This opens to him a new and great career, fills him with hope. Therefore a great man always keeps before him the transcendent, and humbles himself in its presence. Losing this he is no longer great."

About thirty years later these notes were expanded first into a lecture then into an essay which appears in the collection Letters and Social Aims under the title, The Tragic. The following seem to me to be the most significant extracts:

> "What are the conspicuous tragic elements in human nature? The bitterest tragic element in life to be derived from an intellectual source is the belief in a brute Fate or Destiny; the belief that the order of Nature and events is controlled by a law not adapted to man, nor man to that, but which holds on its way to the end, serving him if his wishes chance to lie in the same course, crushing him if his wishes lie contrary to it, and heedless whether it serves or crushes him..... Destiny properly is not a will at all, but an immense whim; and this is the only ground of terror and despair in the rational mind and of tragedy in literature. Hence this antique tragedy which was founded on this faith, can never be reproduced..... There must always remain, however, the hindrance of our private satisfactions by the laws of the world. .....But the essence of tragedy does not seem to me to lie in any list of particular evils.....It is natures not clear, not of quick and steady perceptions, but imperfect characters from which somewhat is hidden that all others see, who suffer most from these causes.....Tragedy seems to consist in temperament, not in events.....The intellect is a consoler, which delights in detaching or putting an interval between a man and his fortune, and so converts the sufferer into a spectator and his pain into poetry. It yields the joys of conversation, of letters, and of science. Hence also the torments of life become tuneful tragedy, solemn and soft with music, and garnished with rich dark pictures. But higher still than the activities of art, the intellect in its purity and the moral sense in its purity are not distinguished from each other, and both ravish us into a region whereunto these passionate clouds of sorrow cannot rise."[1]

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With this general background in mind let us pass to the particular form of Art which Emerson discusses most fully and trace the working out of his esthetic principles in this.

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1. Emerson, Letters and Social Aims, The Tragic (italics mine)

B. Literary Theory

1. Literature

Literature is to Emerson the chief of Arts. His mind had been formed and trained to love abstractions, but the world of music, that most abstract of all arts, was a closed book to him. What is more natural, then, than his preference for literature, which may surely come next in the line of abstract Arts? In his sixty-fourth year he writes in his journal: "After much experience, we find literature, the best thing, and men of thought, if still thinking, the best company."[1]

a. Definition

"Literature", says Emerson, "is the conversion of action into thought for the delight of the intellect."[2] It actualizes thought and idealizes action.[2] Or, in a more whimsical vein, he writes: "Literature is a heap of verbs and nouns enclosing an intuition or two, a few ideas, and a few fables."[3]

b. Function

> "Literature is a point outside of our hodiernal circle through which a new one may be described. The use of literature is to afford us a platform whence we may command a view of our present life, a purchase by which we may move it. We fill ourselves with ancient learning, install ourselves as best we can in Greek, in Punic, in Roman houses, only that we may wiselier see French, English, and American houses and modes of living."[4]

> "All literature writes the character of the wise man. Books.....are portraits in which he finds the lineaments he is forming. The silent and the

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1. Journal, February 13, 1867
2. Journal, April 28, 1834
3. Journal, October 26, 1838
4. Emerson, Essays, First and Second Series, Circles

> eloquent praise him and accost him, and he is stimulated wherever he moves as by personal allusions. A true aspirant, therefore, never needs look for allusions personal and laudatory in discourse. He hears the commendation, not of himself, but more sweet, of that character he seeks in every word that is said concerning character, yea, further, in every fact and circumstance."[1]

There are times in our lives when we are so embarrassed by the webs of circumstance as to forget the realities upon which our existence is based. Literature frees us from this tyranny of the moment and restores to us our rightful heritage of idealism. "That which can dissipate this block of earth into shining ether," says Emerson, "is genius. I have no hatred to the round earth and its gray mountains.....I see with as much pleasure as another a field of corn or a rich pasture whilst I dispute their absolute being."[2]

Literature is a light on the road before us; it gives us more experience than we could encompass in a single life and so it shows us the truest way to live. Pondering this fact, Emerson writes in his journal on June 23, 1845:

> "Literature is before us wherever we go. When I come in the secretest recess of a swamp, to some obscure and rare and, to me, unknown plant, I know that its name and the number of its stamens, every bract and awn, is carefully described and registered in a book in my shelf. So it is with this young soul wandering lonely, wistful, reserved, unfriended, up and down in nature. These mysteries which he ponders, which astonish and entrance him, this riddle of liberty, this dream of immortality, this drawing to love, this trembling balance of motive, and the centrality whereof these are rays, have all been explored to the recesses of consciousness, to the verge of chaos and <u>néant</u>, by men with grander steadfastness and subtler organs of search than any now alive; so that when this tender philosopher comes

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1. Emerson, <u>Essays</u>, First and Second Series, <u>History</u>
2. Journal, February 24, 1836

> from this reverie to literature, he is alarmed (like one whose secret has been betrayed) by the terrible fidelity with which men, long before his day, have described all and much more than all he has just seen as new continent in the west."

c. Origin

Literature was first written down when man began to feel the necessity of written monuments and "in its first expansion into an elegant art, while yet its mechanical advantages were rude and poor, it was devoted only to those great features on the face of the world which first forced themselves on the mind of the writer,- to the history of laws, of colonies, of wars, and of religion. For his illustrations, the writer appealed to nature, and upon the early discovery of the delight given by these appeals, was formed a new department of the Art which was called poetry."[1]

In some such way did the conception of literature enter the racial consciousness. Let us go further and discover Emerson's critical opinions concerning some of its types.

2. Types of Literature

a. General Types

It seems most logical to preface Emerson's theories of esthetic value in the different types of literature he most enjoyed by a discussion of his attitude toward the three general literary trends,- the Classic, Romantic, and the Realistic.

Although he is himself a Romantic in a good many senses,

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1. Journal, May 5, 1844

as I have indicated in Part I, he realized thoroughly the dangers and weaknesses in Romanticism.

> "Romance grows out of ignorance, and so is the curse of its own age, and the ornament of those that follow. Romance is never present, always remote; not a direct, but a reflected ray. It is things cruel and abominable in act that become romantic in memory. Unprincipled bandits are Red Cross Knights and Templars and Martyrs even, in the song of this century. In individual history disagreeable occurrences are remembered long after with complacency. A Romantic Age, properly speaking, cannot exist. Eating and drinking, cold and poverty, speedily reduce men to vulgar animals. Heaven and earth hold nothing fanciful. As mind advances, all becomes practical. Knowledge is a law-giver, as fancy is an abolisher of laws,- and introduces order and limit, even into the character of the Deity.
>
> Nevertheless Romance is mother of Knowledge - this ungrateful son that eats up his parent. It is only by searching for wonders that they found truth. If the unknown were not magnified, nobody would explore."[1]

He defines Classicism largely in terms of contrast.

> "The classic art is the art of necessity; modern romantic art bears the stamp of caprice and chance... Republics run into romance when they lose sight of the inner necessity and organism that must be in their laws, and act from whim. Wagner made music again, classic. Goethe says 'I call the classic the sound and the romantic the sick.....Eugene Sue, Dumas, etc., when they begin a story do not know how it will end; but Walter Scott had no choice, nor Shakespeare in Macbeth.....I who tack things strangely enough together, and consult my ease rather than my strength, and often write <u>on the other side</u>, am yet the adorer of the <u>One</u>.....To be classic, then de rigeur, is the prerogative of a vigorous mind who is able to execute what he conceives. The classic unfolds; the romantic adds."[2]

> "Classic art is the art of necessity; organic; modern or romantic bears the stamp of caprice and chance.....The classic unfolds, the romantic adds. The classic <u>should</u>; the modern <u>would</u>.....The classic draws its rule from the genius of that which it does, and not from by-ends. It does not make a novel to

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1. Journal, December 14, 1823
2. Journal, February 29, 1856

establish a principle of political economy."[1]

> "The doctrine in which the world has acquiesced (has it not?) on this much agitated question of the Classic and Romantic is, that it is not a question of times, nor of forms, but of methods; that the Classic is creative and the Romantic is aggregative; that the Greek in Christian Germany would have built a cathedral; and that the Romantic in our time builds a Parthenon Custom House."[2]

Realism as a critical term did not gain current usage until the later nineteenth century; but Emerson comments upon the type of literature which has come to be known as realistic. For him it is a type which implies a wrong perspective on the part of author and reader. Of its real problems he shows little understanding.

> "What we call obscure condition or vulgar society is that condition and society whose poetry is not yet written, but which you shall presently make as enviable and renowned as any."[3]

> "The fact detached is ugly. Replace it in its series of cause and effect, and it is beautiful. Putrefaction is loathesome; but putrefaction seen as a step in the circle of nature, pleases. A mean or malicious act vexes me; but if I can raise myself to see how it stands related to past and future in the biography of the doer, it becomes comic, pleasant, fair, and prophetic. The laws of disease are the laws of health masked."[4]

> "Only the things placed in their true order are poetry; but displaced or put in kitchen order, they are unpoetic."[5]

> "As it is dislocation and detachment from the life of God, that makes things ugly, the poet, who re-attaches things to nature and the Whole,- re-attaching even artificial things and violations of nature to nature, by a deeper insight,-

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1. Emerson, Natural History of the Intellect, Art and Criticism
2. Journal, August, 1842
3. Emerson, Essays, First and Second Series, Spiritual Laws
4. Journal, September 20, 1838
5. Journal, July, 1853

disposes very easily of the most disagreeable facts."[1]

b. Specific Types

When we begin to talk of particular forms of literature, Emerson's prejudices enter and it becomes somewhat difficult to separate for our present purposes the objective theory from more personal opinions of particular authors. But this we shall attempt as far as possible to do.

(1) Drama

Drama was one of Emerson's early enthusiasms which soon petered out. His first journal shows that Everett might well have been the chief cause of this ardent though brief interest. He writes:

> "Campbell, the poet, said to Professor Everett that the only chance which America has for a truly national literature is to be found in the Drama; we are bound to reverence such high authority, and at least to examine the correctness of the position. Few speculations have such a charm in their nature as this, whose object is how to conduct a dialogue between a man and his fellow just far enough removed from common life to avoid disgust while it must claim the attentions and elevate the tone of feeling."[2]

His studies in Greek civilization and literature in which also Everett was an inspiring guide led him to an examination of Greek drama and he writes in the same journal,

> "In the nation which has always been regarded as the model in all the arts, the fountain of all polished letters, and the pattern of all time, the Drama was invented, and there alone succeeded perfectly. All inquiries upon this subject begin in Greece."[2]

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1. Emerson, Essays, First and Second Series, The Poet
2. Journal, September 22, 1820

He comments upon the effectiveness of Greek tragedy:

> "The history and influence of tragedy, its modes and machines of operation, must be explained from these sources. Tragedy by exciting the emotions of fear and pity, tends to correct the same affections in the soul. This has long been esteemed the philosophy of tragedy, with what correctness we shall not pretend to determine; but these ends were answered in Greece, and more than this, a respect for the gods was effectually inculcated."[1]

He thinks its success here augurs well for its future in America:

> "When a species of composition has been written with success in a brilliant period, and in another and remote land has been likewise known, and after having been discontinued and forgotten is revived in another age and another country - we have every right to say that such an art is agreeable to the dictates of nature. This is the history of Drama and it has every indication that it will flourish everywhere under favourable circumstances."[2]

His enthusiasm rises to even greater heights in the years when he is teaching at his brother's school:

> "In connection with the remarks on drama, it should be further said that this art is the most attractive, naturally, of all. The others speak to a man from a distance, through cold and remote associations. The literature of a generation generally addresses but a scanty portion of society; of their contemporaries, history and poetry are confined to a few readers; philosophy and science to still fewer; but the buskined muse comes out impatient from these absorptions, to repeat in a popular and intelligible form the productions of the closet, to the manners of high and low life, to act upon the heart; and succeeds, by thus avoiding the haughty port of the Parnassian queens, to draw the multitude by the cords of love."[3]

Special devices of staging, scenery, and plot advancement he touches on only briefly as if his opinion were book knowl-

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1. Journal, September 22, 1820
2. Journal, January 19, 1822
3. Journal, March 9, 1822

edge rather than experience. The problem of motivation seems on the whole to interest him most. He comments on the excellence of the Greek chorus:

> "A fine thought was the chorus of the Greek drama. It is like the invention of the cipher in Arithmetic, so perfect an aid and so little obvious. An elegant outer conscience to the interlocutors; Charles says it was the Not-Me."[1]

Strangely enough he seems to see a great deal of worth in the use of supernatural machinery:

> "It does not follow that, if anything be out of the common course of human experience, it is not natural to the drama and may not talk with ordinary agents.....For the belief in unseen agents is so universal, and indeed is a consequence of a belief in God, that no mind ever revolts at the idea."[2]

Upon scenery, he has one brief comment of a more or less historical nature:

> "A constituent part of the Drama from its very invention was the ornament of scenery. This suggests itself unavoidably as an important element of the plan which acts altogether by deceiving the audience into the conviction that the actors really <u>are</u> the persons they represent. The illusion could be best promoted by removing all extraneous circumstances and affording the imagination the help of the senses."[2]

He urges that the drama in America be made "an oracle of those opinions and sentiments which multiply and strengthen the bonds of society."[3]

But after the year 1836 when his first book <u>Nature</u>

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1. Journal, March 17, 1836
2. Journal, January 19, 1822
3. Journal, July, 1822

left the press we find no more mention made of the drama in his journals. Shakespeare, a life-long enthusiasm, he prefers to study as the ideal poet, not as a dramatist. All the great Shakespearian plays he refers to as poems, as in this journal entry of November 9, 1838:

> "Read Lear yesterday and Hamlet today with new wonder, and mused much on the great soul whose authentic signs flashed on my sight in the broad continuous daylight of these poems."[1]

He was well versed in the dramatists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as we know by his frequent reference to them in his lectures and essays, particularly Beaumont and Fletcher, Webster, and Ben Jonson; but he never devotes any length of time to an analysis of their technique or of the drama as a developing type. Nor does he further urge it as the art of the future America. Indeed there was little in America's dramatic art at that time to encourage his study of or hope for this possibility.

(2) Novels

Novels Emerson was always a bit distrustful of and dissatisfied with. He did not start to read this type of literature until his college days and never grew fond of it. He enjoyed a good story, but his love for compression led him to the antidote for this, and his interest in the individual led him to history and biography. On the whole, although he has a good deal to say in praise of Scott, he finds this type of literature too superficial. One wonders what his opinion might have been of the modern psychological novel.

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1. Journal, November 9, 1838

Emerson defines a novel in the following manner:

> "Society is the stage on which manners are shown; novels are their literature. Novels are the journal or record of manners."[1]

The source of our interest in fiction, he notes in a journal of the school-teaching period, is human misery.[2]

> "To relive one hour of life by exciting the sympathies to a tale even of imaginary joy, was accounted a praiseworthy accomplishment; and honour and gold were due him whose rare talent took away for a moment the memory of care and grief."[2]

More than this - the love of stories accompanies us from our childhood, he writes seven years later -

> "The passion for novels is natural. Every child asks hisGrandpapa to tell him a story. Cinderella and Red Ridinghood are the novels of the Twoshoeses, and Walter Scott is grandpa of the grown up children."[3]

On April 11, 1831, he is still lenient with the taste for novel-reading although almost instinctively he refers to it as an amusement for the young.

> "The love of novels is the preference of sentiment to the senses. Who are they that love an ideal world and dwell in it? The young, the pure, who believe that love is stronger than lust; who delight in the belief that virtue may prevail over the power of circumstances.....What you seek in these novels is the friendships on which an infinite trust might be reposed. They would act for you across the earth and could not be bribed, or scared or cooled."

But this amused tolerance gives way to skepticism as

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1. Emerson, Conduct of Life, Behaviour
2. Journal, March 9, 1822
3. Journal, July 21, 1829

he grows older. June 15, 1844, finds him recording in his journal:

> "Novels make us skeptical by giving prominence to wealth and social position, but I think them to be fine occasional stimulants, and though with some shame, I am brought into an intellectual state. But great is the poverty of their inventions. The perpetual motive and means of accelerating or retarding interest is the dull device of persuading a lover that his mistress is betrothed to another... Novels make us great men while we read them. How generous, how energetic should we be in the crisis described; but unhappy is the wife or brother or stranger who interrupts us whilst we read; nothing but frowns and tart replies from the reading gentleman for them. Our novel-reading is a passion for results; we admire parks and the love of beauties and the homage of parliaments."

And four years later finds this attitude even more pronounced:

> "I still feel a little uneasiness about these novels. Why should these sorceries have a monopoly of our delicious emotions? The novel still weakly uses the cheap resource, property married away instead of earned, and that is the chief conjuring-stick it has; for the instincts of man always attach to property, as he knows what accumulations of spiritual force go to the creation of that, and sobs and heart-breaks and sudden self-sacrifice very easily result from dealing with it."[1]

Yet throughout he seems to feel that there is a future for the novel if, and only if, it can find its way below the surface of human activities.

> "A novel may teach one thing as well as my choosings at the corner of the street which way to go,- whether to my errand or whether to the woods,- this namely, that action inspires respect; action makes character, power, man, God. These novels will give way, by and by, to diaries or autobiographies; captivating books, if only a man knew how to choose among what he calls his

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1. Journal, October 1, 1848

> experiences that which is really his experience, and how to record truly!"[1]
>
> "The novel will find way to our interiors, one day, and will not always be a novel of costume merely. These stories are to stories of real life what the figures which represent the fashions of the month on the front pages of the magazine are to portraits and inspired pictures."[2]
>
> "How far from life and manners and motives the modern novel still is! Life lies about us dumb; the day, as we know it, has not yet found a tongue."[3]

The technique of the novel Emerson gives little attention to. He observes in passing that "It is no easy matter to write a dialogue. Cooper, Sterling, Dickens, and Hawthorne cannot."[4] And he makes one rather penetrating observation on character drawing:

> "The novelist should not make any character act absurdly, but only absurdly as seen by others. For it is so in life. Nonsense will not keep its unreason if you come into the humorists' point of view, but unhappily we find it is fact becoming sense, and we must flee again into the distance if we would laugh ."[5]

But that is all.

c. History and Biography

With the single exception of poetry, Emerson found more real delight in history and biography than in any other form of literature. These forms, as did the lyric note in poetry which he loved, spoke to the individualist in him.

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1. Journal, January 31, 1841
2. Journal, October 1, 1848
3. Emerson, Society and Solitude, Books
4. Journal, September 18, 1839
5. Emerson, Natural History of the Intellect, Powers and Laws of Thought

Indeed, in Emerson's categories, History and Biography can hardly be reckoned as separate types, for in his first volume of essays he tells us that "All history becomes subjective; in other words there is properly no history; only biography."[1] In brief, the transcendental theory which makes these two approach one another for Emerson is this:

> "There is one mind common to all individual men. Every man is an inlet to the same and to all of the same.....Of the works of this mind history is the record.....But the thought is always prior to the fact; all the facts of history preëxist in the mind as laws.....This human mind wrote history and this must read it.... If the whole of history is one man, it is all to be explained from individual experience....Each new fact in man's private experience flashes a light on what great bodies of men have done, and the crises of his life refer to national crises... The student is to read history actively and not passively; to esteem his own life the text, and books the commentary.....All public facts are to be individualized, all private facts are to be generalized. Then at once History becomes fluid and true, and Biography deep and sublime."[1]

In Emerson's lecture on Books and Reading he repeats:

> "In reading history.....prefer the history of individuals.....Among the best books are certain autobiographies."[2]

And October 29, 1834, he lists in his journal:

> "Michel Angelo, Buonarotti; John Milton; Martin Luther; George Fox; Lafayette; Falkland; Hampden. Are not these names seeds? 'Men akin unto the universe.'"
>
> "The great value of Biography," Emerson believed, "consists in the perfect sympathy that exists between like minds. Space and time are absolute nullity to this principle. An action of Luther's that I heartily approve do I

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1. Emerson, Essays, First and Second Series, History
2. Emerson, Society and Solitude, Books

adopt also. We are imprisoned in life in the company of persons painfully unlike us, or so little congenial to our highest tendencies, and so congenial to our lowest, that their influence is noxious, and only now and then comes by us some commissioned spirit that speaks as with the word of a prophet to the languishing, nigh dead faith in the bottom of the heart, and passes by, and we forget what manner of men we are. It may be that there are very few persons at any one time in the world who can address with any effect the higher wants of men. This defect is compensated by the recorded teaching and acting of this class of men. Socrates, St. Paul, Antonious, Luther, Milton have lived for us as much as for their contemporaries, if by books or by tradition their life and words come to my ear. We recognize with delight a strict likeness between their noblest impulses and our own. We are tried in their trial. By our cordial approval we conquer in their victory. We participate in their act by our thorough understanding of it. And thus we become acquainted with a fact which we could not have learned from our fellows that the faintest sentiments which we have shunned to indulge from the fear of singularity are older than the oldest institutions,- are eternal in man; that we can find ourselves, our private thoughts, our preferences, and aversions, and our moral judgments perhaps more truly matched in an ancient Lombard or Saxon or Greek than in our own family."[1]

There are one or two suggestions as to the art of writing biographies and autobiographies:

"I am always reminded, and now again reading last night Rousseau's Confessions, that it is not the events in one's life, but in the faculty of selecting and reporting them that the interest lies."[2]

"An autobiography should be a book of answers from one individual to the many questions of the time. Shall he be scholar? the infirmities and ridiculousness of the scholar being clearly seen. Shall he fight? Shall he be rich? Shall he go for the ascetic, or the conventional life?- he being aware of the double consciousness. Shall he value mathematics? Read Dante? - or not? Aristophanes? Plato? Cosmogonies and scholar's courage?"[3]

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1. Journal, January 13, 1835
2. Journal, July 25, 1847
3. Journal, April 26, 1847

In this type more than in any other, because they are in Emerson's sense both history and biography, is that class of books which he called the best -

> "the Bibles of the world, or the sacred books of each nation, which express for each the supreme result of their experience.....also such other books as have acquired a semi-canonical authority in the world as expressing the highest sentiment and hope of nations.....These books are the majestic expressions of the universal conscience. .....They are for the closet and to be read on the bended knee. Their communications are not to be given or taken with the lips and the end of the tongue, but out of the glow of the cheek, and with the throbbing heart."[1]

Biographies and sacred books were always in a handy corner of Emerson's library.

d. Poetry

But it was poetry which ranked as the highest form of literary art for him. His pages are filled with definitions of poetry. Here are some which seem to me most central:

> "It is the language of the passions which do not ordinarily find their full expression in the saner strains of prose. We should rest our argument on this; that there seems to be a tendency in the passions to clothe fanciful views of objects in beautiful language. It seems to consist in the pleasure of finding out a connection between a material image and a moral sentiment. Few men are safe when they begin to describe poetry; they talk at random, or hardly prevent the ends of the lines from rhyming, and are like the mimes of a madman who went mad himself. Poetry never offers a distinct set of sensations. Science penetrates the sky, Philosophy explains its adaption to our wants, and Poetry grasps at its striking phenomena and combines them with the moral sentiment which they naturally suggest. Its images are nothing but the striking

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1. Emerson, Society and Solitude, Books

occurrences selected from Nature and Art and clothed in an artful combination of sounds...."[1]

"What is poetry? It is philosophy, it is humour, it is a chime of two or three syllables, it is a relation of thought to things, or of language to thought. In converses with all science and all imagination, with all accidents and objects, from the grandest that are accessible to the senses, and grander than those, to the coarsest parts of life."[2]

The topic of design in poetry is an appealing one to him. In the year Nature is published the following passage finds its way into his journal:

"Do they think the composition too highly wrought? A poem should be a blade of Damascus steel, made up of a mass of knife-blades and nails and parts every one of which has had its whole surface hammered and wrought before it has been welded into the sword, to be wrought over anew."[3]

An entry in 1846 carries the idea a bit further:

"A great design belongs to a poem, and is better than any skill in execution.....We shall come to value only that excellence of finish which great design brings with it."[4]

"Every poem must be made up of lines that are poems."[5]

Yet this design must be one which nature dictates:

"It is not meters, but a meter-making argument that makes a poem,- a thoughtso passionate and alive, that like the spirit of a plant or animal, it has an architecture of its own, and adorns nature with a new thing."[6]

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1. Journal, January, 1822
2. Journal, June 30, 1826
3. Journal, August 14, 1837
4. Journal, August 22, 1846
5. Journal, October 1, 1848
6. Emerson, Essays, First and Second Series, The Poet

In poetry the symbolic power of words reaches its height.

> "God himself does not speak in prose, but communicates with us by hints, omens, inference, and dark ressemblances in objects lying all around us.....A good symbol is the best argument and is a missionary to persuade thousands..... All thinking is analogizing and it is the use of life to learn metonymy.....Poetry is the perpetual endeavor to express the spirit of the thing, to pass the brute body and search the life and reason which causes it to exist;- to see that the object is always flowing away whilst the spirit or necessity which causes it subsists."[1]

> "In poetry, Nature bears the whole expense. In prose, there must be concatenation, a mass of facts, and a method.....but in poetry the mere enumeration of natural objects suffices."[2]

> "Poetical expression constitutes to half the world the beauty of poetry and in this it seems to ressemble Algebra, for both make language an instrument and depend solely upon it without having any abstracted use."[3]

The subject which the poet chooses is of no particular importance nor is there a class of "poetic subjects."

> "There is no subject that does not belong to the Poet; manufacture and stock brokerage, as much as sunsets and souls; only the things placed in their true order are poetry; but displaced, or put in kitchen order, they are unpoetic."[4]

> "Poets do not need to consider how fruitful the topic is, for with their superfluity of eyes every topic is opulent. Spenser seems to delight in his art for his own skill's sake. In the Muiopotmos, see the security and ostentation with which he draws out and refines his description of a butterfly's back and wings, of a spider's thread and spinning.....it is all like the working of an exquisite loom which strongly and unweariedly

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1. Emerson, Letters and Social Aims. Poetry and the Imagination
2. Journal, November, 1863
3. Journal, July, 1853
4. Journal, January, 1822

yields fine webs for exhibition, and defiance of all spinners."[1]

Emerson's views on excellence in rhyme and meter as we might expect find their basis for comparison in nature.

"Rhyme; not tinkling rhyme, but grand Pindaric strokes, as firm as the tread of a horse. Rhyme that vindicates itself as an art, the stroke of a bell of a cathedral. Rhyme which knocks at prose and dullness with the stroke of a cannon ball. Rhyme which builds out into Chaos and old night a splendid architecture to bridge the impassable, and call aloud on all the children of morning. I wish to write such rhymes as shall not suggest restraint, but contrariwise the wildest freedom."[2]

"Thy trivial harp will never please
Or fill my craving ear;
Its chords should ring as blows the breeze,
Free, peremptory, clear.
No jingling serenader's art,
Nor tinkle of piano strings,
Can make the wild blood start
In its mystic springs.
The kingly bard
Must smite the chords rudely and hard,
As with hammer or with mace;
That they may render back
Artful thunder, which conveys
Secrets of the solar track,
Sparks of the supersolar blaze."[3]

"When I go into the fields in a still sultry day, in a still sultry humor, I do perceive that the finest rhythms and cadences of poetry are yet unfound, and that in that purer state which glimmers before us, rhythms of a faery and dream-like music shall enchant us, compared with which the finest measures of English poetry are psalm-tunes. I think now that the very finest and sweetest closes and falls are not in our metres, but in the measures of eloquence, which have greater variety and richness than verse.....Now, alas, we know something too much about our poetry,- we are not part and parcel of it."[4]

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1. Journal, August 22, 1846
2. Journal, June, 1839
3. Collected Poems, The Bard, Merlin I
4. Journal, September 28, 1841

"The iterations of rhymes of Nature are already an idea or principle of science, and a guide. The sun and star reflect themselves all over the world in the form of flowers and fruits; and in the human head, the doctrine of series appears, which takes up again the few functions and modes and repeats them with new and wondrous results on a higher plane."[1]

"Everyone may see, as he rides on the highway through an uninteresting landscape, how a little water instantly relieves the monotony; no matter what objects are near it,- a gray rock, a grass-patch, an alder-bush, or a stake,- they become beautiful by being reflected. It is rhyme to the eye and explains the charm of rhyme to the ear. Shadows please us as still finer rhymes. Architecture gives the like pleasure by the repetition of equal parts in a colonnade, in a row of windows, or in wings; gardens by the symmetric contrasts of the beds and walks. In society you have this figure in a bridal company, where a choir of white-robed maidens give the charm of living statues; in a funeral procession where all wear black; in a regiment of soldiers in uniform.....Let Poetry then pass, if it will, into music and rhyme. That is the form which itself puts on. We do not enclose watches in wooden, but in crystal cases, and rhyme is the transparent frame that allows the pure architecture of thought to become visible to the mental eye."[2]

His standards for good poetry, in summary, are these:

Every word must be indispensable. "Good poetry could not have been otherwise than it is.....The feeling of all great poets has accorded with this. They found the verse, not made it."[3]

"Poetry must be as new as foam and as old as the rock."[4]

There is an ethical, standard-making element in the finest poetry.

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1. Journal, September 4, 1849
2. Emerson, Letters and Social Aims, Poetry and the Imagination
3. Emerson, Society and Solitude, Art
4. Journal, March, 1845

"Poetry and prudence should be coincident. Poets should be lawgivers; that is, the boldest lyric inspiration should not chide and insult, but should announce and lead the civil code, and the day's work."[1]

"Poetry must be affirmative. It is the piety of the intellect. 'Thus saith the Lord,' should begin the song.....The supreme value of poetry is to educate us to a height beyond itself or which it rarely reaches;- the subduing mankind to order and virtue. He is the true Orpheus who writes his ode, not with syllables, but men."[2]

"I said to Bryant and to these young people that the high poetry of the world from the beginning has been ethical, and it is the tendency of the ripe modern mind to produce it."[3]

Yet this quality must not be the result of a conscious aim on the part of the poet.

"I like that poetry which, without aiming to be allegorical, is so. Which, sticking close to its subject, and that perhaps trivial, can yet be applied to the life of man and the government of God and be found to hold."[4]

It is Emerson's final tribute to his best-loved art that he makes appreciation of literary value measurable by appreciation of poetry.

"There are inner chambers of poetry which only poets enter. Thus loosely we might say that Shakespeare's Sonnets are readable only by poets, and, it is a test of poetic apprehension, the value which a reader attaches to them."[5]

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1. Emerson, Essays, First and Second Series, Prudence
2. Emerson, Letters and Social Aims, Poetry and the Imagination
3. Journal, April 20, 1838
4. Journal, October 5, 1835
5. Journal, June 16, 1868

2. The Art of Reading

"Good reading is nearly as rare as good writing," says Emerson in a letter to a friend on January 17, 1840. "I believe they are both done usually by the same persons."

It goes almost without saying that the critic must be a good reader. Emerson has scattered miscellaneously throughout his books and journals advice to anyone desirous of learning this art of reading. It seems in line with my purpose to bring some of the most significant of these selections together.

A discussion of his attitude toward that list of books which long generations of good readers have selected as classics may well come first.

> "As whole nations have derived their culture from a single book.....so perhaps the human mind would be a gainer, if all the secondary writers were lost,- say, in England,all but Shakespeare, Milton, and Bacon,- through the profounder study so drawn to those wonderful minds.....T'is an economy of time to read old and famed books."[1]

On April, 1859, he writes in his journal:

> "I delight in persons who clearly perceive the transcendent superiority of Shakespeare to all other writers. I delight in the votaries of the genius of Plato. Because this clear love does not consist with self-conceit. It marks intellectual values, but is not lost in them, nor the fool of them, but holding them under control, and socially."

But Emerson goes beyond praise of the classics. He tells his young pupil further: "Never read any but what you like".[1] The classics may well be the happiest hunting ground, but within this range the reader is to find his own and cleave

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1. Emerson, Society and Solitude, Books

to them.

> "One of the last secrets we learn as scholars is to confide in our own impressions of a book. If Aeschylus is that man he is taken for, he has not yet done his office when he has educated the learned of Europe for a thousand years. He is now to approve himself master of delight to me. If he cannot do that, all his fame shall avail him nothing. I were a fool not to sacrifice a thousand Aeschyluses to my intellectual integrity."[1]

He suggests as a library: Homer, Herodotus, Aeschylus, Plato, Plutarch and the chief of the Neo-Platonists; Livy, Horace, Tacitus, Gibbon; Dante, Michel Angelo, Montaigne; old legends and mythologies; the poets, historians and philosophers of England's sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; famous autobiographies and Table-Talks (like Eckermann's Conversations with Goethe); the famous Bibles and sacred books of the world; Vocabularies, such as Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy and Imaginative Books,- some of the better novels and the great poets of all time.[2]

Emerson could never quite reconcile himself to becoming a reader of foreign tongues although he had had training in Latin, Greek, French, and Italian and had succeeded in reading straight through Goethe's works in the original German. In November, 1826, his journal finds him pondering a quotation of Butler's,-

> "The Translator is a small Factor that imports Books of the growth of one language into another; but it seldom turns to account, for the commodity is perishable, and the finer it is the worse it endures transportation."

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1. Journal, October 18, 1837
2. Emerson, Society and Solitude, Books

But thirteen years later he records a conviction that "all languages are intertranslatable."[1] And in his lecture on Books he declares stoutly:

> "I do not hesitate to read.....all good books in translations. What is really best in any book is translatable,- any real insight or broad human sentiment.....I rarely read any Latin, Greek, German, Italian, sometimes not a French book in the original, which I can procure in a good version. I like to be beholden to the great metropolitan English speech, the sea which receives tributaries from every region under heaven. I should as soon think of swimming the Charles River when I wish to go to Boston, as of reading all my books in originals, when I have them rendered for me in my mother-tongue."[2]

There are certain ways of going about one's reading which seem to be most profitable. Literature should not be resorted to as a consolation or a decalogue; then it is defamed and disguised.[3] Nor should one sit down with a resolute frown to study literature.

> "Let no man flatter himself with the hope of a true good or solid enjoyment from the study of Shakespeare or Scott. Enjoy them as recreation. You cannot please yourself by going to stare at the moon; 'tis beautiful when in your course it comes."[4]

Nor should there be any persistent motive for his reading if he is to gain the greatest pleasure from it.

> "If a man read a book because it interests him, and read in all directions for the same reason, his reading is pure, and interests me; but if he reads with ulterior objects, if he reads that he may write, we do not impute it to him for righteousness. In the first case he is like one who takes up only so much land as

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1. Journal, November 14, 1839
2. Emerson, Society and Solitude, Books
3. Journal, March 15, 1845
4. Journal, May 2, 1824

he uses; in the second, he buys land to speculate with."[1]

We must not become slaves of our books, permit them to paralyze our own powers of thought or blind us to the worth and divine possibility of the real life about us.

"Our reading is mendicant and sycophantic. In history our imagination plays us false. Kingdom and lordship, power and estate, are a gaudier vocabulary than private John and Edward in a small house and common days' work; but the things of life are the same to both; the sum total of both is the same."[2]

"Why need I go gadding into the scenes and philosophy of Greek and Italian history before I have justified myself to my benefactors? How dare I read Washington's campaigns when I have not answered the letters of my own correspondents. Is that not a just objection to much of our reading? It is a pusilanimous desertion of our work to gaze after our neighbors.....I can think of nothing to fill my time with, and I find the Life of Brant....It is a very extravagant compliment to pay to Brant."[3]

"There is something of poverty in our criticism. We assume that there are a few great men, all the rest are little; that there is but one Homer, but one Shakespeare, one Newton, one Socrates.....In good hours we do not find Shakespeare or Homer over-great,- only to have been translators of the happy present,- and every man and woman divine possibilities."[4]

"You must read a great book to know how poor are all books. Shakespeare suggests a wealth that beggars his own."[5]

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1. Journal, July 25, 1847
2. Emerson, Essays, First and Second Series, Self-Reliance
3. Ibid., Spiritual Laws
4. Emerson, Society and Solitude, Success
5. Journal, September 16, 1838

"That book is good
Which puts me in a working mood.
Unless to Thought is added Will,
Apollo is an imbecile.
What parts, what gems, what colors shine!
Ah, but I miss the grand design."[1]

Emerson is well fitted to describe the exhileration that comes from good reading and he does, with convincing enthusiasm:

"'Tis a godlike invention which thus annihilates to all purposes of mental improvement both space and time, and suffers the solitary scholar by these silent interpreters to converse with minds who illuminated the beginnings of the world. My memory goes back to a past immortality, and I almost realize the perfection of a spiritual intercourse which gains all the good and lacks all the inconvenience and disgust of close society of imperfect beings. We are then likest to the image of God, for in the grateful rapidity of thought a thousand years become a day. Providence has equitably distributed the highest order of minds along successive periods of time and not clustered them all into one fortunate age."[2]

"It is remarkable that involuntarily we always read as superior beings. Universal history, the poets, the romancers, do not in their stateliest pictures - in the sacerdotal, the imperial palaces, in the triumphs of will or of genius - anywhere lose our ear, anywhere make us feel that we intrude, that this if for better men; but rather it is true, that in their grandest strokes we feel most at home. All that Shakespeare says of the king, yonder slip of a boy that reads in the corner feels to be true of himself. We sympathize in the great moments of history, in the great discoveries, the great resistances, the great prosperities of men;- because there law was enacted, the sea was searched, the land was found, or the blow was struck for us, as we ourselves would have done or applauded."[3]

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1. Collected Poems, The Poet
2. Journal, October, 1824
3. Emerson, Essays, First and Second Series, History

4. Theories of the Creative Ability

All men in varying proportion have taste, a capacity for appreciating Beauty; this is so because all men have an organization corresponding more or less to the entire system of nature from which our first intuitions of Beauty come.[1] But there are some who become so imbued with the Beauty of things that they can no longer contain it within themselves; they must express its meaning for them in new forms and ever newer. These are the men of Genius.

a. Genius

These are they who express for us what we all feel and what we would say, but find ourselves inarticulate about. It is Genius who has learned so well the art of yielding itself passive to the Over-Soul that it becomes aware of its own divine nature and serves as a channel for the World-Spirit. "If we should meet Shakespeare," muses Emerson, "perhaps we should not be conscious of any steep inferiority; no: but of a great equality,- only that he possessed a strange skill of using, of classifying his facts which we lacked."[2] There seems to be about the Men of Genius some extra presence of mind, an ability to seize the fact and image which are familiar to us all yet which we cannot collect ourselves sufficiently to use at the right time.[3] He receives accurately the impressions of the outer world and reports them without excess or loss.[4] This

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1. Emerson, Natural History of the Intellect, Michael Angelo
2. Emerson, Essays, First and Second Series, Intellect
3. Journal, October 14, 1838
4. Emerson, Lectures and Biographical Sketches, Perpetual Forces

perfect health, this equality of inlet and outlet,[1] is the higher tone which we call genius.

> "Potentially all are wise enow; wine is what we want, wine of wine, excitement, opportunity, an initiative.....Genius consists in health, in plenipotence of that 'top of condition' which allows of not only exercise but frolic of faculty; to woo and coax the strong Instinct to bestir itself and work its miracle is the end of all wise endeavor. The Instinct is resistless, and knows the way; and is melodious, and at all points a god."[2]

The result is something always incalculable and new in nature which liberates us from ourselves and shows us new horizons. Emerson said,

> "I owe to genius always the same debt, of lifting the curtain from the common and showing me that gods are sitting disguised in every company."[3]

At best this super-health is not to be analyzed, but taking full cognizance of this, Emerson still attempts to name some of its outstanding qualities.

Its depth of insight into humanity is perhaps one of the first aspects of its greatness which comes to his mind.

> "It enters into all other men's labors. A tyrannical privilege to convert every man's wisdom or skill, or to show for the first time what all these fine and complex preparations were for.....Genius is a poor man and has no house; but see this proud landlord, who has built the great house and furnished it delicately, opens it all to him and beseeches him respectfully to make it honorable by entering there and eating bread."[4]

His essay on Shakespeare is in large part given over to an expan-

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1. Emerson, Lectures and Biographical Sketches, Perpetual Forces
2. Journal, September, 1845
3. Emerson, Natural History of the Intellect, Poems and Laws of Thought
4. Journal, November 5, 1843

sion of this idea:

> "The genius finds himself in the river of the thoughts and events, forced onward by the ideas and necessities of his contemporaries..... Every master has found his materials collected, and his power lay in his sympathy with his people and in his love of the materials he wrought in.....A great poet who appears in illiterate times, absorbs into his sphere all the light which is everywhere radiating. Every intellectual jewel, every flower of sentiment, it is his fine office to bring to his people; and he comes to value his memory equally with his invention.....Other men say wise things as well as he; only they say a good many foolish things, and do not know when they have spoken wisely. He knows the sparkle of the true stone, and puts it in high place, wherever he finds it. Such is the happy position of Homer, perhaps; of Chaucer, of Saadi. They are librarians and historiographers as well as poets."[1]

And perhaps even more strikingly in his famous essay on the Over-Soul:

> "Genius is religious. It is a larger imbibing of the common heart. It is not anomalous, but more like, and not less like other men. There is, in all great poets, a wisdom of humanity which is superior to any talents they exercise."[2]

The deep understanding which Emerson shows us of this particular aspect of Genius perhaps explains to us better than any other single article of criticism why Emerson advised a young disciple of his to shun an expurgated edition of Chaucer - and indeed - all expurgated editions;[3] or the extent of his enthusiasm for Walt Whitman who was so scantily appreciated by the majority of his literary contemporaries.

Closely allied to this breadth of humanity in Genius

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1. Emerson, Representative Men, Shakespeare
2. Emerson, Essays, First and Second Series, The Over-Soul
3. Woodbury, Talks with Ralph Waldo Emerson

is its regard for truth. Its insight comes from its peculiar degree of self-reliance.

> "To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for all men - that is genius."[1]

It pierces through to the source of spontaneity and instinct, and wins to primary wisdom as Intuition whilst all later teachings are tuitions.[1] There is no choice to genius.[2] The man of genius is content with the truth only.[3] He uses the positive degree.[3]

> "The secret of Genius is to suffer no fiction to exist for us; to realize all that we know; in the high refinement of modern life, in arts, in sciences, in books, in men, to exact good faith, reality, and a purpose; and first, last, midst, and without end, to honor every truth by use."[4]

Oftentimes genius seems to consist merely in trueness of sight, in using such words as alone could convince us that he who used them had been an eye-witness; not merely a repeater of things told him.[5] "The girl who said 'the earth was a-gee'; Lord Bacon when he speaks of exploding gunpowder as a fiery wind blowing with that expansive,' these are the poets," writes Emerson.[5]

Since Truth is in reality ineffable and human language can only describe and approximate things as they are, it follows that there is a special wonder in the vocabulary of Genius. Deep insight, just as nature, always ultimates its thought in a

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1. Emerson, Essays and Second Series, Self-Reliance
2. Emerson, Representative Men, Shakespeare
3. Emerson, Essays, First and Second Series, The Over-Soul
4. Emerson, Representative Men, Goethe
5. Journal, May 11, 1835

thing.[1] Therefore "genius implies imagination, the use of symbols, figurative speech."[1]

> "Detachment by illumination is the gift of genius as I have somewhere written. The poet sees some figure for a moment in an expressive attitude, and, without hesitating because it is a mere purposeless fragment, he paints out that figure with what skill and energy he has."[2]

And these must be subtly compounded.

> "The man of genius should occupy the whole space between God or Pure Mind and the multitude of uneducated men. He must draw from the infinite Reason, on one side; and he must penetrate into the heart and sense of the crowd on the other. From one, he must draw his strength; to the other he must owe his aim..... At onepole is Reason, at the other Common Sense. If he be defective at either extreme of the scale, his philosophy will seem low and utilitarian or it will appear too vague and indefinite for the uses of life."[3]

> "The constructive intellect produces thought, sentences, poems, plans, designs, systems. It is the generation of the mind, the marriage of thought with nature. To genius must always go two gifts, the thought and the publication. The first is revelation, always a miracle.....But to make it available, it needs a vehicle by which it is conveyed to me. To be communicable it must become a picture or a sensible object. We must learn the language of facts.....It is a conversion of all nature into the rhetoric of thought, under the eye of judgment with a strenuous exercise of choice. And yet the imaginative vocabulary seems to be spontaneous also. It does not flow from experience only or mainly but from a richer source."[4]

In Genius there seems to be a beautiful adequacy to the needs of expression;

> "Its speech is like a river; it has no

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1. Emerson, Letters and Social Aims, Poetry and the Imagination
2. Journal, February, 1861
3. Emerson, Nature, etc., Literary Ethics
4. Emerson, Essays, First and Second Series, Intellect

> straining to describe, more than there is straining in nature to exist.....It is in itself a mutation of the thing it describes."[1]

In consists neither in improvising nor in remembering alone; but in both ever trembles the beam of the balance.[2] This is the power in an artist which was doubtless in Emerson's mind when he wrote in his journal, "I think Genius alone finishes."[3]

And yet because the man of Genius feels more keenly than anyone else the fact the Truth is ineffable, there is in his work an unfolding of meaning which suggests more than the work itself.....

> "Genius is enveloped and undermined by wonder. The last fact is still astonishment,- mute, bottomless, boundless, endless wonder.... To come out from a forest in which we have always lived, unexpectedly on the ocean, startles us, for it is a symbol of this."4

> "True genius seeks to defend us from itself. True genius will not impoverish, but will liberate, and add new senses.....The rich see their mistakes and poverty, the poor their escapes and resources."5

> "The great poet makes us feel our own wealth, and then we think less of his compositions. His best communication to our mind is to teach us to despise all he has done."6

> "What is it men love in Genius but its infinite hope which degrades all that it has done. Genius counts all its miracles poor and short. Its own idea is never executed."7

Finally, Genius is deeply moral.

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1. Emerson, Nature, etc., The Method of Nature
2. Journal, March 24, 1846
3. Journal, May 8, 1844
4. Journal, November 10, 1841
5. Emerson, Representative Men, Uses of Great Men
6. Emerson, Essays, First and Second Series, The Over-Soul
7. Ibid., New England Reformers

> "The moral is the measure of health, and in the voice of Genius I hear invariably the moral tone, even when it is disowned by the words;- health, melody, and a wider horizon belong to moral sensibility. The finer the sense of justice, the better poet."

writes Emerson.[1] The laws of the universe enter into the web and woof of it and render it real in the eternal union of Truth, Beauty, and Goodness.

b. Talent

Talent differs from Genius in degree. Talent has not the same insight into and love for humanity that genius has; its declarations are neither so fundamental nor so universal, for they are often learned from society rather than through communication with the Over-Soul.

> "Men of talent create a certain artificial position, a camp in the wilderness somewhere, about which they contrive to keep much noise, firing of guns, and running to and fro of boys and idlers with what uproar they can. They have talents for contention, and they nourish a small difference into a loud quarrel, and persuade the surrounding population that it is the cause of the country and man. But the world is wide; nobody will go there after tomorrow; the gun can defend nothing but itself; not itself any longer than the man is by. But Genius flings itself on real elemental things, which are powers, self-defensive, which first subsist and therefore resist unwearibly forevermore all that opposes.....The scholar does not fall into the existing forms and professions; they may fall into him; but is guided in his selection by religion and necessity."[2]

Genius is a finer love,

> "a love impersonal, a love of the flower and perfection of things, and a desire to draw a new picture

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1. Emerson, Lectures and Biographical Sketches, The Sovereignty of Ethics
2. Journal, March, 1845

> or copy of the same. It looks to the cause and life; it proceeds from within outward, whilst Talent goes from without, inward. Talent finds its models, methods, and ends, in society, exists for exhibition, and goes to the soul only for power to work. Genius is its own end and draws its means and the architecture from within."[1]

Talent therefore does not speak truth as genius does.

> "The observations of talent are punctures; but of genius shafts which unite at the bottom of the mine."[2]

Talent uses truth when truth serves the end of its projected work of art, but

> "Genius loves truth and clings to it, so that what it says and does is not a wilderness or a by road, visited for curiosity or forgotten, but on the great highways of Nature, which were before the Appian was built, which all men and angels travel, and he holds fast these, a cement and comfort of the social being of men."[3]

The language of Talent is not that of inner necessity. Emerson quotes Mackintosh's definition of talent as "'habitual facility of execution.'"[4]

Since Talent is wiling to accept Society's standards rather than to surrender to the urgencies of its own deepest intuitions, it cannot be moral in the sense which Emerson uses that adjective in description of Genius. It is secondary. Genius is primary. Emerson comments on Montaigne:

> "Talent without character is friskiness. The charm of Montaigne's egotism and of his anecdotes is that there is a stout cavalier, a seigneur of France at home in his chateau, responsible for all this chatting; and if it could be shown to be a

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1. Emerson, Nature, etc., Literary Ethics
2. Journal, September 28, 1841
3. Journal, March, 1845
4. Journal, February, 1861

> jeu d'esprit of Scaliger or some other scribacious person, written for the booksellers, and not resting on a real status picturesque in the eyes of all men, it would lose all its value."[1]

What happens in the great moments of genius when it draws near to eternal truth? And how does it find this source again when the springs have run dry? Emerson's theories of Inspiration are typically transcendental and Platonic.

c. Inspiration

Literature was all written before time was and he who is "so finely organized that he can penetrate into that region where the air is music" receives inspiration and writes as the spirit directs him.[2] The translation is never quite perfect; even the greatest loses a word here and there, substitutes something of his own, and so miswrites the theme,- but the more nearly a poet resigns himself to his mood, the thought which agitates him is expressed and the expression is organic.[2]

> "The Poet works to an end above his will, and by means, too, which are out of his will. Every part of the poem is therefore a true surprise to the reader, like the parts of the plant, and legitimate as they. The muse may be defined, Supervoluntary ends effected by supervoluntary means."[3]

Moments of inspiration are those in which dreams, surmises, half-formed ideas and philosophies over which we have long been brooding suddenly come to flower in us and reveal

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1. Journal, January 9, 1862
2. Emerson, Essays, First and Second Series, The Poet
3. Emerson, Natural History of the Intellect, Instinct and Inspiration

their meaning. Emerson writes in his journal at the dawn of his literary career:

> "What can be truer than the doctrine of inspiration? Of fortunate hours? Things sail dim and great through my head. Veins of rich ore are in me , could I only get outlet and pipe to draw them out."[1]

And three years later finds him musing over the same thought:

> "Every object suggests to me in certain moods a dim anticipation of profound meaning, as if, by and by, it would appear to me why the apple-tree, why the meadow, why the stump stand there, and what they signify to me."[2]

The whole doctrine he expresses more fully in his essay on The Intellect and in his lecture on Memory:

> "Any piece of knowledge I acquire today, a fact that falls under my eyes, a book I read, a piece of news I hear, has a value at this moment exactly proportioned to my skill to deal with it. Tomorrow, when I know more I recall that piece of knowledge and use it better.....Have you not found memory an apotheosis of deification? The poor short lone fact dies at the birth. Memory catches it up into her heaven, and bathes it in immortal waters. Then a thousand times over it lives and acts again, each time transfigured, ennobled.....In low or bad company you fold yourself in your cloak, withdraw yourself entirely from all the doleful circumstances, recall and surround yourself with the best associates.....The memory has a fine art of sifting out the pain and keeping all the joy."[3]
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> "In every man's mind, some images, words, and facts remain, without effort on his part to imprint them, which others forget, and afterwards these illustrate to him important laws. All our progress is an unfolding, like the vegetable bud. You have first an instinct, then an opinion, then a knowledge, as the plant has root, bud and fruit. Trust the instinct to the end, though you can render no reason. It is vain to

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1. Journal, October 22, 1835
2. Journal, October 9, 1838
3. Emerson, Natural History of the Intellect, Memory

> hurry it. By trusting it to the end, it shall ripen into truth, and you shall know why you believe.....It seems as if the law of intellect resembled that law of nature by which we now inspire, now expire the breath; by which the heart now draws in, and then hurls out the blood,....So now you must labor with brains, and now you must forbear your activity, and see what the great Soul showeth."[1]

If it happens so - that after seasons of "decay or eclipse, darkening months or years, the faculties revive to their fullest extent"-[2] what are the sources of this revival? "Solitary converse with Nature," writes Emerson, "is perhaps the first; for there are uttered sweet and dreadful words never uttered in libraries."[3] And that we may keep ourselves more keenly alive to these precious influences we must keep our bodies in tune.

> "The sublime vision comes to the pure and simple soul in a clean and chaste body. That is not inspiration which we owe to narcotics, but some counterfeit excitement and fury.....The Poet's habit of living should be set on a key so low and plain that the common influences should delight him. His cheerfulness should be the gift of the sunlight; the air should suffice for his inspiration and he should be tipsy with water."[4]

> "We shall not have a sincere literature, we shall not have anything sound and grand as Nature itself, until the bread-eaters and water-drinkers come."[5]

We can count as many sources of inspiration as we have affinities, says, Emerson, but for practical purposes we can

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1. Emerson, Essays, First and Second Series, The Intellect
2. Emerson, Letters and Social Aims, Inspiration
3. Journal, January 9, 1862
4. Emerson, Essays, First and Second Series, The Poet
5. Journal, May 23, 1846

list a few.[1] Besides communion with nature there is conversation at its best, new poetry (by which he means "chiefly old poetry which is new to the reader"), and oftentimes the "experience of writing letters is one of the keys to the modus of inspiration."[1] At another time he writes in his journal:

> "What is indispensable to inspiration? Sleep. There are two things, both indispensable: sound sleep; and the provocation of a good book or a companion."[2]

But first, last, and always as we should expect, the emphasis is upon nature as a primary source of all divine intuitions. We find this belief reiterated in his journals, letters, lectures, and essays; and it creeps into his poems. In some verses which remind me forcibly of Wordsworth's Expostulation and Reply, he summarizes his view:

The Apology

> "Think me not unkind and rude
> That I walk alone in grove and glen;
> I go to the god of the wood
> To fetch his word to me.
> Tax not my sloth that I
> Fold my arms beside the brook;
> Each cloud that floated in the sky
> Writes a letter in my book."[3]

d. Originality

The problem of originality usually arises in any critical discussion of Genius and Inspiration so it seems fitting that I should summarize what I can find of Emerson's belief on this point.

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1. Emerson, Letters and Social Aims, Inspiration
2. Journal, October 31,1848
3. Emerson, Collected Poems, The Apology

In the absolute sense there is no such thing; there runs through history a relentless disregard of the individual in regard for the race.[1]

> "It is not an individual, but the general mind of man that speaks from time to time, quite careless and quite forgetful of what mouth or mouths it makes use of."[1]

All originality is relative.[2]

But admitting this what can we mean when we use the term? What is this relative originality?

> "It is <u>being</u>, being one's self, and reporting accurately what we see and are. Genius is in the first instance, sensibility, the capacity of receiving just impressions from the external world, and the power of coördinating these after the laws of thought."[3]

It is, then, the finer, more complete self-reliance which we find in genius. Emerson writes in his journal in 1841:

> "The great majority of men are not original, for they are not primary, have not assumed their own vows, but are secondaries,- grow up and grow old in seeming and following; and when they die, they occupy themselves to the last with what others will think and whether Mr. A and Mr. B will go to their funeral. The poet has pierced the shows and come out on the wonder which envelopes all: more, he has conspired with the high cause and felt the holy glee with which man detects the ultimate oneness of the Seer and the spectacle."[4]

He reinforces this idea in his lecture on <u>Instinct and Inspiration</u>:

> "All men are inspirable. Whilst they say only the beautiful and sacred words of necessity, there is no weakness and no repentence. But

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1. Journal, August 17, 1834
2. Journal, November 10, 1841
3. Emerson, <u>Letters and Social Aims</u>, <u>Quotation and Originality</u>
4. Journal, November 14, 1841

> the moment they attempt to say these things by memory, charlatanism begins."[1]

Even learning may stand in the way of a poet. There is a "wisdom of Ignorance."[2] "Milton was too learned, though I hate to say it. It wrecked his originality."[2]

The genius is again our benefactor in that he reveals to us our own originality, could we learn to live as deeply as he, we too might find means of expressing it. It is Genius which affirms and reaffirms:

> "Each man is a new power in Nature. He holds the keys of the world in his hands..... He enters the world by one key. Herein is the wealth of each. His equipment, though new, is complete.....Every man is a new method and distributes things anew."[3]

e. Imagination

You will remember that imagination which can express its world in symbols is one of the first powers which Emerson attributes to genius. Let us see how he analyzes this insight.

"There are two powers of the imagination," he writes in his journal on a day of analysis,-

> "one that of knowing the symbolic character of things and treating them as representative; and the other (Elizabeth Hoar thinks) is particularly the tenaciousness of an image, cleaving unto it and letting it not go, and by the treatment, demonstrating that this figment of thought is as palpable and objective to the poet as is the ground on which he stands, or the walls of houses about him."[4]

This idea of Miss Hoar's appealed strongly to Emerson, perhaps

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1. Emerson, Natural History of the Intellect, Instinct and Inspiration
2. Journal, August 17, 1834
3. Emerson, Natural History of the Intellect, etc., Powers and Laws of Thought
4. Journal, March 24, 1846

because it echoed a conclusion which he had recorded in his journal eleven years earlier regarding this same tenacity and search for complete expression:

> "Let the imaginative man deny himself and stick by facts. As a man must not bring his children into company naked, and must not bring more children into the world than he can clothe, so the idealist must retain his thoughts until they embody themselves in fit outward illustrations."[1]

The first power - that of knowing the symbolic power of things and using them as representative, he cannot say enough about. The perpetual mystery of it intrigues his fancy. His journals are full of passages like the following:

> "Imagination transfigures, so that only the cosmical relations of the object are seen. The persons who rise to beauty must have this transcendency. The calm sky hides all wisdom and power in beauty. That haughty outline of form, vis superba formae which poets praise is that. Under calm precise outline, the immeasurable and divine. It is as if new eyes were opened so that we say the lilac bush, or the oak, stone, or tiger, the genius of that kind, and so could rightly and securely use the name for truth it stood for in the human mind; and still again, under this genius, its origin, its origin in a generic law, and thence its affinities to cosmical laws, and to myriads of particulars; and then again deeper causes below, and so on ad infinitum."[2]

> "This power of imagination, the making of some familiar object, such as fire, or rain, or a bucket or shovel do new duty as an exponent of some truth or general law, bewitches and delights men. It is a taking of dead sticks, and clothing about with immortality; it is music out of creaking and scouring. All opaque things are transparent and the light of heaven struggles through."[3]

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1. Journal, April 16, 1835
2. Journal, October 9, 1860
3. Journal, September 11, 1860

He realizes the danger of its very fascination and early in his career proposes to outline for himself and others the elements which he considers the Evils of the Imagination. But it is, on the whole, a half-hearted attempt and he never goes very far with it:

> "I propose to write an essay on the Evils of the Imagination which after such a panegyric on this beautiful faculty as it shall easily admit, may treat of these egregious errors, that growing out of some favorite fancy, having shot up into whole systems of philosophy or bodies of divinity have absorbed truth for thousands of years. The Essay should exemplify its statement by some of the most signal instances of this capacity in which the imagination has held the reason of Man. Thus the picturesque dogma of a ruined world has had a most pernicious fascination over nations of believers. It was an error locked with their life. They gave up the ghost for the love of this lie. And it clings, to this day, in the high places of knowledge and refinement. Hence the avidity with which tales of wonder are caught and propagated."[1]

His analysis of the differences between Imagination and Fancy is, so far as I can discover, confined to a passage in his essay on Poetry and the Imagination. As is characteristic of him he has concentrated ideas which reveal his power of discrimination and which are capable of a great deal of expansion, into a comparatively short space:

> "Imagination respects the cause. It is the vision of an inspired soul reading arguments and affirmations in all nature of that which it is driven today. But as soon as this soul is released a little from its passion and at leisure plays with the resemblances and types, for amusement and not for its moral end, we call its action Fancy.....Imagination is central; Fancy, superficial. Fancy relates to the surface, in which

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1. Journal, December 10, 1824

> the greater part of life lies.....Fancy, a play as with dolls and puppets which we choose to call men and women; imagination, a perception and affirming of a real relation between a thought and some material fact. Fancy amuses; imagination expands and exalts us. Imagination uses an organic classification. Fancy joins by accidental resemblance, surprises and amuses the idler, but is silent in the presence of a great passion and action. Fancy aggregates; imagination animates. Fancy is related to color; imagination to form. Fancy paints; imagination sculptures."[1]

5. The Writer

Emerson's ideal writer has the happy faculty of finding material for his genius in whatever enters his life.

> "Whatever he beholds or experiences comes to him as a model, and sits for its picture..... He believes that all that can be thought can be written, first or last; and he would report the Holy Ghost, or attempt it. Nothing so broad, so subtle, or so dear but comes therefore commended to his pen,- and he will write. In his eyes a man is the faculty of reporting and the universe is the possibility of being reported."[2]

The universe seems to conspire to give him the education he needs for his chosen profession:

> "Writing is the greatest of the arts, the subtilest, and of most miraculous effect; and to it the education is costliest. On the writer the choicest influences are concentrated,- nothing that does not go to his costly equipment; a war, an earthquake, revival of letters, the new dispensation by Jesus, or by angels; Heaven, Hell power, science, the Neant, exist to him as colors for his brush.....In this art modern society has introduced a new element by introducing a new audience.....the transformation of the laborer into reader and writer has compelled the learned and the thinkers to address them."[3]

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1. Emerson, Letters and Social Aims, Poetry and the Imagination
2. Emerson, Representative Men, Goethe, the Writer
3. Emerson, Natural History of the Intellect, Art and Criticism

> "Milton is a good apple on that tree of England. It would be impossible by any Chemistry we know to compound that apple otherwise; it required all the tree; and out of a thousand of apples, good and bad, this specimen apple is at last produced. That is: we have a well-knit, hairy industrious Saxon race, Londoners intent on their trade, steeped in their politics; wars of the Roses; voyages and trade to the Low Countries, to Spain, to Lepanto, to Virginia, and Guiana - all bright with use and strong with success. Out of this valid stock choose the validest boy, and in the flower of his strength open to him the whole Dorian and Attic beauty and the proceeding ripeness of the same in Italy. Give him the very best of this Classic beverage. He shall travel to Florence and Rome in his early manhood; he shall see the country and the works of Dante, Angelo, and Raffaelle. Well, on the man to whose unpalled taste this delicious fountain is opened, add the fury and the hereditary and already culminated Puritanism - and you have Milton, a creation impossible before or again; and all whose graces and whose majesties involve this wonderful combination,- quite in the course of things once, but not iterated. The drill of the regiment, the violence of the pirate and smuggler, the cunning and thrift of the haberdasher's counter, the generosity of the Norman earl, are all essential to the result."[1]

He must enter into the lives of his fellow-men and have the courage to share their sorrows as he has the privilege of sharing their joys:

> "In the ascetic of the men of letters, I see not well how he can avoid a persistent and somewhat rigorous temperance. Saved from so many hurts and griefs, he must impose a discipline on himself. He must, out of sympathetic humanity, wound his own bosom, bear some part of the load of woe, and the most convenient and graceful to him is a quiet but unrelaxing self-command. If he accept this and manfully stablish it, it shall stablish him. Then without a blush he shall meet and console the much-enduring sons of toil and narrow life."[2]

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1. Journal, June 27, 1846
2. Journal, April 2, 1836

> "Society has no graver interest than the well-being of the literary class. And it is not to be denied that men are cordial in their recognitions and welcome of intellectual accomplishments. Still the writer does not stand with us on any commanding ground. I think this to be his own fault.....How can he be honored when he does not honor himself; when he loses himself in the crowd; when he is no longer a lawgiver, but the sychophant, ducking to the giddy opinion of a reckless public; when he must sustain with shameless advocacy some bad government, or must bark, all the year round, in opposition; or write conventional criticism, or profligate novels; or, at any rate, write without thought, and without recurrence, by day and by night to the sources of inspiration."[1]

Emerson desires earnestly that the man of letters should learn to trust his deepest intuitions rather than be swayed by the opinion about him. He admonishes himself in a journal entry written before a lecture:

> "In that sermon to Literary Men which I propose to make, be sure to admonish them not to be ashamed of their gospel. The mason, the carpenter hold up their trowel and saw with honest pride; the Scholar thrusts his book into his pocket and drops the nosegay he has gathered in the fields, and in conversation with the grocer and farmer affects to talk of business and farms.....Other professions thrive because they who drive them do that one thing with a single and entire mind. Feel that fair weather or foul weather, good for grass or bad for grass, scarcity or plenty, is all nothing to you: that your plough may go every day; and leave to God the care of the world."[2]

And again he reaffirms:

> "Happy is he who looks into his work to know if it will succeed, never into the times or the public opinion; and who writes from the love of imparting certain thoughts, and not from the necessity of sale - who writes always to the unknown friend."[3]

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1. Emerson, Representative Men, Goethe, the Writer
2. Journal, May 28, 1836
3. Journal, April 19, 1848

He expands the thought in a longer passage:

> "A man to thrive in literature must trust himself. The voice of society sometimes, and the writings of great geniuses always are so noble and prolific that it seems justifiable to follow and imitate. But it is better to be an independent showmaker than to be an actor and play a king.....Shun manufacture or the introducing an artificial arrangement in your thoughts - it will surely crack and come to nothing,- but let alone tinkering, and wait for the natural arrangement of your treasures; that shall be chemical affinity, and is a new and permanent substance added to the world, to be recognized as genuine by every knowing person at sight..... A meek self-reliance I believe to be the law and constitution of good writing. A man is to treat the world like children who must hear and obey the spirit in which he speaks, but which is not his. If he thinks he is to sing to the tune of the times, is to be the decorous sayer of smooth things to lull the ear of society, and to speak of religion as the great traditional thing to be mutely avoided or kept at a distance by civil bows, he may make a very good workman for the booksellers, but he must lay aside all hope to wield or so much as touch the bright thunderbolts of truth which it is given to the true scholar to launch, and whose light flashes through the ages without diminution."[1]

Only the writer who is self-reliant can be truly sincere and the first rule of good writing is with Emerson, sincerity. He has no patience with the literary man who dabbles with words merely in the desire to make a pretty pattern.

> "A mistake of the main end to which they labor is incident to literary men, who, dealing with the organ of language, and the subtlest, strongest, and longest-lived of man's creations, and only fitly used as the weapon of thought and of justice,- learn to enjoy the pride of playing with this splendid engine, but rob it of its almightiness by failing to work with it."[2]

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1. Journal, October 10, 1835
2. Emerson, Nature, etc., Literary Ethics

"If your subject does not appear the flower of the world at this moment, you have not yet rightly got it."[1]

"The way to speak and write what shall not go out of fashion is, to speak and write sincerely. The argument which has not power to reach my own practice, I may well doubt, will fail to reach yours. But take Sidney's maxim: 'Look in thy heart, and write.' He that writes to himself writes to an eternal public which you have come at in attempting to satisfy your own curiosity..... Life alone can impart life.....There is no luck in literary reputation. They who make up the final verdict upon every book are not the partial and noisy readers of the hour when it appears; but a court of angels, a public not to be bribed, not to be intreated, and not to be overawed, decides upon every man's title to fame.....The permanence of all books is fixed by no effort friendly or hostile, but by their own specific gravity, or the intrinsic importance of their contents to the constant mind of man."[2]

"The way to avoid mannerism, the way to write that shall not go out of fashion, is to write sincerely, to transcribe your doubt or regret or whatever state of mind, without the airs of a fine gentleman or a great philosopher, without timidity or display, just as they lie in your consciousness, casting on God the responsibility of the facts. This is to dare."[3]

The Poet comes to be for Emerson the highest type of literary artist. And for this poet his standards grow even more exacting. He is the seer and the prophet of the nation. Universal truth, beauty, and goodness speak through his lips. Let him be sure they are purged and worthy channels of his high message. "The test of the poet is that he is able to read the poetry of affairs."[4] He must know the heights and depths of

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1. Journal, October 12, 1866
2. Emerson, Essays, First and Second Series, Spiritual Laws
3. Journal, July 17, 1837
4. Journal, March, 1845

human experience and communicate its meaning in words dictated by nature herself.

> "It would seem that the genuine bard must be one in whom the extremes of human genius meet; that his judgment must be as exact and level with life as his imagination is discursive and incalculable. It would seem as if abundant erudition, foreign travel, and gymnastic exercises must be annexed to this awful imagination and fervent piety to finish Milton. That the boisterous childhood, careless of criticism and poetry, the association of vulgar and unclean companions, were necessary to balance the towering spirit of Shakespeare, and that Wordsworth has failed of pleasing by being too much a poet."[1]

> "'Poets are guardians of admiration in the hearts of the people.' Fine offices are discharged by the men of literary and poetic faculty everywhere. Each has certain opinions, tastes, shades of thought, which go at large in the great common world of men, of books, selecting every connate fact, particle, word, relation, work of art, until, by and by, that which was or might seem a mere whimsy or trifle not worth the entertainment of a thought has grown to some size and is ready to be born."[2]

> "The Poet should not only be able to use nature as his hieroglyphic, but he should have a still higher power, namely, an adequate message to communicate; a vision for such a faculty. Therefore, when we speak of Poet in the great sense, we seem to be driven to such examples as Ezekiel and Saint John and Menu with their moral burdens; and all those we commonly call Poets become rhymesters and poetasters by their side."[3]

> "The Poet should instal himself and shove all usurpers from their chairs by electrifying mankind with the right tone, long wished for, never heard. The true centre thus appearing, all false centres are suddenly superseded, and grass grows in the Capitol. Now and then we hear rarely a true tone, a single strain of the right ode; but the Poet does not know his place.....The Poet is here to

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1. Journal, June 30, 1826
2. Journal, November 17, 1841
3. Journal, April 6, 1842

> see the type and truly interpret it. O Mountain, what would your highness say, thou grand expressor of the present tense, of permanence? Yet is there also a taunt at the mutables of old Sitfast. If the poet could only forget himself in his theme, be the tongue of the mountain,- his egotism would subside, and that form line which he had drawn would remain like the names of discoverers of planets, written in the sky in letters that could never be obliterated."[1]
>
> "The artist who is to produce a work which is to be admired, not by his friends or his townspeople or his contemporaries, but by all men, and which is to be more beautiful to the eye in proportion to its culture, must dis-individualize himself, and be a man of no party, and no manner, and no age, but one through whom the soul of all men circulates as the common air through his lungs. He must work in the spirit in which we conceive a prophet to speak, or an angel of the Lord to act; that is, he is not to speak his own words, or do his own works, or think his own thoughts, but he is to be an organ through which the universal mind acts."[2]

The particular problems of the writer and poet I shall deal with under the next topic,- Stylistics.

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1. Journal, June 27, 1846
2. Emerson, Society and Solitude, Art

C. Stylistics

"No wonder a writer is rare," says Emerson in his Journal on September, 1845. "It requires one inspiration, or transmutation of Nature into thought, to yield him truth; another inspiration to write it." The language we use in writing must necessarily be more carefully selected than that we use in speech and one of the first problems of the writer becomes a means of testing the adequacy of his medium.

> "The tongue is prone to lose the way
> Not so the pen, for in a letter
> We have not better things to say
> But surely say them better."[1]

1. Philosophy of Language

Emerson's philosophy of language is dealt with most compactly in the chapter bearing this same heading, number IV in Nature. In summary it is this:

> "Nature is the vehicle of thought, and in a simple, double, and threefold degree: (1) Words are signs of natural facts.....The use of the outer creation is to give us language for the beings and changes of the inward creation. Every word which is used to express a moral or intellectual fact, if traced to its root, is found to be borrowed from some material appearance. Right means straight; wrong means twisted.....(2) Particular natural facts are symbols of particular spiritual facts.... Every appearance in nature corresponds to some state of the mind, and that state of the mind can only be described by presenting that natural appearance as its picture.....The idioms of all languages approach each other in passages of the greatest eloquence and power.....A man conversing in earnest, if he watch his intellectual processes,

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1. Collected Poems, Life

> will find that a material image, more or less luminous, arises in his mind, contemporaneous with every thought, which furnishes the vestment of the thought. Hence, good writing and brilliant discourse are perpetual allegories.... (3) Nature is the symbol of spirit.....The whole of nature is a metaphor of the human mind....The memorable words of history, and the proverbs of nations consist usually of a natural fact, selected as a picture or parable of a moral truth. Thus: A rolling stone gathers no moss; A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.....What is true of proverbs is true of all fables, parables, and allegories."

He will write best, then, who seeks communion with the Over-Soul in the sources of inspiration and from the intuitions received there chooses words which are the truest symbols of nature, and metaphors which by an inner harmony describe his state of mind.

> "Nature offers all her creatures to the poet as a picture-language. Being used as a type, a second wonderful value appears in the object, far better than its old value, as the carpenter's stretched cord, if you will hold it close enough, is musical inthe breeze.....Things admit of being used as symbols, because nature is a symbol in the whole and in every part. Every line we draw in the sand, has expression; and there is no body without life; all harmony, of health; and, for this reason, a perception of beauty should be sympathetic, or proper only to the good.....The Universe is the externization of the Soul.....It is nature the symbol, nature certifying the supernatural, body overflowed by life, which man worships with coarse, but sincere rites. The inwardness and mystery of this attachment drives men of every class to the use of emblems.....We are symbols and inhabit symbols.....We sympathize with the symbols and being infatuated with the economical uses of things, we do not know that they are thoughts.....Through that better perception the poet stands one step nearer thing, and sees the flowing or metamorphosis; perceives that thought is multiform; that within the form of every creature is a force impelling it to ascend

> into a higher form; and, following with his eyes the life, uses the forms which express the life and so his speech flows with the flowing of nature."[1]

Such is the nature of the world that each symbol is a microcosm reflecting the truth, beauty, and goodness of the whole. Hence it is capable of infinite application.

> "The metamorphosis of Nature shows itself in nothing more than this, that there can be no word in our language that cannot become typical to us of Nature by giving it emphasis. The world is a Dancer; it is a Rosary; it is a Torrent; it is a Boat; a Mist; a Spider's Snare; it is what you will; and the metaphor will hold, and it will give the imagination keen pleasure. Swifter than light the world converts itself into the thing you name, and all things find their right place under this new and capricious classification. There is nothing small or mean to the soul. It derives as grand a joy from symbolizing the Godhead or his universe under the form of a moth or a gnat as of a Lord of Hosts. Must I call the heaven and earth a maypole and country fair with booths or an anthill, or an old coat, in order to give you a shock of pleasure which the imagination loves and the sense of spiritual greatness? Call it a blossom, a rod, a wreath of parsley, a tamarisk-crown, a cock, a sparrow, the ear instantly hears and the spirit leaps to the trope."[2]

> "Every word we speak is million-faced, or convertible to an indefinite number of applications. If it were not so, we could read no book. Your remark would only fit your case, not mine. And Dante, who described his circumstance, would be unintelligible now. But a thousand readers in a thousand different years shall read his story and find it a picture of their story by making, of course, a new application of every word."[3]

Because neither in reading or writing do we completely

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1. Emerson, Essays, First and Second Series, The Poet
2. Journal, July 10, 1841
3. Journal, December 12, 1841

receive the message of the Over-Soul, Language rarely is the fact it stands for; it may describe, but commonly only suggests.

> "I think that language should aim to describe the fact, and not merely suggest it. If you, with these sketchers and dilettanti, give me some conscious, indeterminate compound word, it is like a daub of color to hide the defects of your drawing. The poet both draws well and colors at the same time."[1]

There are certain limitations to the writer's ability to express himself which make this true.

> "The new in art is always formed out of the old.....As far as the spiritual character of the period overpowers the artist, and finds expression in his work, so far it will retain a certain grandeur.....No man can quite emancipate himself from his age and country, or produce a model in which the education, the religion, the politics, usages, and arts of his times shall have no share. Though he be never so wilful and fantastic, he cannot wipe out of his work every trace of the thoughts amidst which it grew.[2]..... In each of the arts there is much which is not spiritual. Each has a material basis, and in each the creating intellect is crippled in some degree by the stuff on which it works.....Another deduction from the genius of the artist is what is conventional in his art, of which there is much in every work of art.....One consideration more exhausts, I believe, all the deductions from the genius of the artist in any given work. This is the adventitious. Thus the pleasure that a noble temple gives us is only in part owing to the temple. It is exalted by the beauty of the sunlight, the play of the clouds, the landscape around it, its grouping with the houses, trees, and towers in its vicinity.....In poetry, 'It is tradition more than invention that helps the poet to a good fable.' The adventitious beauty of poetry may be felt in the greater delight which a verse gives in happy quotation than in the poem."[3]

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1. Journal, June 16, 1842
2. Emerson, Essays, First and Second Series, Art
3. Emerson, Society and Solitude, Art

So far as possible the artist should make the most of his means by constant reference to the vocabulary of nature.

> "Nature is the best posture-maker.....So will the thought control the sentence and the style, strive against it as you may. The subject - I must so often say - is indifferent; any word, every word in the language, every circumstance, becomes poetic, when in the hands of a higher thought. T'is a problem that genius can very well solve - to illuminate every low or trite word you can offer it. Give your rubbish to Shakespeare, he will give it all back to you in gold and stars."[1]

> "When I look at the sweeping sleet amid the pine woods, my sentences look very contemptible, and I think I will never write more; but the words prompted by an irresistible charity, the words whose path from the heart to the lips I cannot follow,- are fairer than the snow. It is pitiful to be an artist."[2]

> "All writing is by grace of God. People do not deserve to have good writing, they are so pleased with bad. In these sentences they show me, I can find no beauty, for I see death in every clause and every word. There is a fossil, or a mummy character which pervades this book. The best sepulchres, the vastest catacombs, Thebes and Cairo, Pyramids, are sepulchres to me. I like gardens and nurseries. Give me initiative, spermatic, prophesying, men-making words."[3]

2. Words

Let us weigh the power of the individual word as a symbol to carry the writer's meaning.

> "No man can write well who thinks there is any choice of words for him. The laws of composition are as strict as those of sculpture and architecture. There is always one line that ought to be drawn, or one proportion that should be kept, and

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1. Journal, October 7, 1863
2. Journal, January 21, 1841
3. Journal, November 22, 1841

> every other line or proportion if wrong, and so far wrong as it deviates from this. So in writing there is always a right word, and every other than that is wrong. There is no beauty in words except in their collocation. The effect of a fanciful word misplaced, is like that of a horn of exquisite polish growing on a human head.....In good writing every word means something; in good writing, words become one with things. I take up a poem; if I find that there is not a single line there nor word but expresses something that is true for me as well as for him. .....It is adamant. Its reputation may be slow, but sure from every caprice of taste. No critic can hurt it, but he will only hurt himself by tilting against it."[1]

Our search for vital words carries us back to people who live near to nature, in the sense that necessity dictates their speech:

> "See how children build up a language; how every traveller, every laborer, every impatient boss who sharply shortens the phrase or the word to give his order quicker, reducing it to the lowest possible terms, and there it must stay - improves the national tongue."[2]

> "People sometimes wonder that persons wholly uneducated to write, yet eminent in some other ability, should be able to use language with so much purity and force. But it is not wonderful. The manner of using language is surely the most decisive test of intellectual power, and he who has intellectual force of any kind will be sure to show it there. But that is the first and simplest vehicle of the mind, is of all things next to the mind, and the vigorous Saxon that uses it well is of the same block as the vigorous Saxon that formed it and works after the same manner."[3]

Emerson loves to linger over lists of various natural objects, pondering the suggestiveness:

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1. Journal, July 8, 1831
2. Emerson, Letters and Social Aims, Resources
3. Journal, January 11, 1832

"Last night I read many pages in Chester Dewey's Report of Herbaceous Plants in Massachusetts. With what delight we always come to these images! The mere names of reeds and grasses, of the milkweeds, of the mind tribe and the gentians, of mallows and trefoils, are a lively pleasure.....The names are poems often. Erigeron because it grows early, is thus named the Old Man of the Spring."[1]

"The list of ships' names in the newspaper is worth considering. Like the moon, the sea seems the refuge of things lost on earth: Fairy, Sylph, Neptune, Britomart, Ivanhoe, Rob Roy."[2]

There are certain types of words which are of concentrated worth. For example:

"Classifying words outweigh many arguments:- upstart, cockney, granny, pedant, prig, precision, rowdy, niggers."[3]

3. Phrases, Illustrations, Quotations

So it is with the larger elements in composition. Language which has grown up out of inevitable circumstance and has been cherished by those who live next to nature in prudence is the most effective because the most universal in appeal:

"Ballads, bon mots, anecdotes, give us better insight into the depths of past centuries than grave and voluminous chronicles."[4]

The simple language of children often goes more nearly to the heart of things than the circumlocutions of a scholar and in nursery stories is often embedded the wisdom of a nation.

"What is so bewitching as the experiments of children on grammar and language? The purity of their grammar corrects all the anomalies of our

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1. Journal, April 6, 1842
2. Journal, October 5, 1837
3. Journal, May 8, 1844
4. Journal, April, 1826

irregular verbs and anomalous nouns.....They use the strong double negative which we English have lost from our books, though we keep it in the street..... Ellen calls the grapes 'green berries'.....What is so weak and thin as our written style today in what is called literature? We use ten words for one of the child's. His strong speech is made up of nouns and verbs and names the facts. Our writers attempt by many words to suggest, since they cannot describe."[1]

"The most trivial and gaudy fable, Kehama, Jack the Giant Killer, Red Ridinghood every grandma's nursery rhyme contains, as I have elsewhere noted, a moral that is true to the core of the world. It is because Nature is an instrument so omnipotently musical that the most careless or stupid hand cannot draw a discord from it."[2]

"It appears to me that it is a secret of the art of eloquence to know that a powerful aid would be derived from the use of forms of language which were generally known to men in their infancy, and which now, under another and unknown garb, but forcibly reminding them of early impressions, are likely to be mistaken for opinions whose beginnings they cannot recollect, and therefore suppose them to be innate. At least, if by such operation they cannot convince the mind, they may serve to win attention by this awakening but ambiguous charm. By these forms of language I mean a paraphrase of some sentence in a Primer or other child's book common to the country. The spell could be more perfect, perhaps, if instead of such a paraphrase, the words of a sentence should be modulated to the cadence of the aforesaid infant literature."[3]

So it is with the proverbs and fables which a nation has preserved by constant use.

"Of proverbs, although the greater part have so the smell of current bank-bills that one seems to get the savor of all the marketmen's pockets, and no lady's mouth may they soil, yet are some so beautiful that they may be spoken by fairest lips unblamed; and this is certain,- that they give comfort and encouragement, aid and abetting to daily

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1. Journal, July 6, 1840
2. Journal, September 20, 1840
3. Journal, December 5, 1828

action. For example 'There are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it,' is a piece of trust in the riches of nature and God, which helps men always."[1]

"Every homely proverb covers a single and grand fact. Two of these are often in my head lately: 'Every dog has his day,' which covers the fact of otherism, or rotation of merits: and 'There are as good fish in the sea....', which was Nelson's adage of merit, and all men's of marriage. My third proverb is as deficient in superficial melody as either of the others. 'The Devil is an ass.' The seamen use another which has much true divinity: 'Every man for himself and God for us all.'"[2]

"This voice of fable has in it somewhat divine. It came from thought above the will of the writer. That is the best part of each writer, which has nothing private in it; that which he does not know, that which flowed out of his constitution, and not from his too active invention; that which in the study of a single artist you might not easily find, but in the study of many you would abstract as the spirit of all.....Still more striking is the expression of this fact in the proverbs of all truth, without qualification. Proverbs, like the sacred books of each nation, are the sanctuary of the intuitions. That which the droning world, chained to appearances, will not allow the realist to say in his own words, it will suffer him to say in proverbs without contradiction."[3]

The language of tradesmen and sailors has a verve and accuracy which can oftentimes not be duplicated.

"What a pity we cannot curse and swear in good society! Cannot the stinging dialect of the sailors be domesticated? It is the best rhetoric and for a hundred occasions these forbidden words are the only good ones. My page about Consistency would be better written thus: Damn Consistency!"[4]

"If you would learn to write, 'tis in the street you must learn it. Both for the vehicle and for the aims of fine arts, you must frequent

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1. Journal, September 5, 1838
2. Journal, September 20, 1838
3. Emerson, Essays, First and Second Series, Compensation
4. Journal, October 24, 1840

> the public square. The people and not the college is the writer's home."[1]

The ability to use a quotation well tells much of a writer's ability, for this is a literary custom more often abused than not.

> "Quotation - yes, but how differently persons quote! I am as much informed of your genius by what you select as by what you originate. I read the quotation with your eyes and find a new and fervent sense.....At first view, 'tis all quotation,- all we have. But presently we make distinction: first, by wise quotation.....One quotes so well that the person quoted is the gainer. The quoter's selection honours and celebrates the author. The quoter gives more fame than he receives aid. Thus Coleridge. Quoting is often merely of a suggestion which the quoter drew, but which the author is quite innocent. For good quoting, then, there must be originality in the quoter,- bent, bias, delight in the truth, and only valuing the author in the measure of his agreement of the truth, which we see, and which he had the luck to see first..... In another's words describe your fact, use them as freely as you use language and the alphabet whose use does not impair your originality.....Yet in proportion to your reality of life and perception will be your difficulty of finding yourself expressed in others' words or deeds."[2]

> "Next to the originator of a good sentence is the first quoter of it. Many will read the book before one thinks of quoting a passage. As soon as he has done this, the line will be quoted east and west. Then there are great ways of borrowing. Genius borrows noble.....But the moment there is the purpose of display, the fraud is exposed. In fact it is as difficult to appropriate the thought of others, as it is to invent. Always some steep transition, some sudden alteration of temperature, or of point of view, betrays the foreign interpolation."[3]

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1. Emerson, Society and Solitude, title essay
2. Journal, October 31, 1867
3. Emerson, Letters and Social Aims, Quotation and Originality

4. Style

a. Unity and Design

Emerson, like a good individualist, is somewhat impatient with the tradition that everyone must express himself according to approved modes of literary structure. He writes in his journal, "Why should we write dramas and epics and sonnets and novels-in-two-volumes? Why not write as variously as we dress and think?" But he is nonetheless strict in his demand for an inner unity in the piece in question and for a design proceeding from a natural order.

> "Fine thoughts flowing from an idea perceived by the mind, and fine thoughts wilfully recollected and exhibited, differ as leaves and flowers growing from the branch, and leaves and flowers tied together by a string."[1]

> "It is well and truly said that proportion is beauty; that no ornament in the details can compensate for want of this; nay that the ornamented details only make disproportion more unsightly; and that proportion charms us even more perhaps when the materials are coarse and unadorned. I see these truths chiefly in that species of architecture which I study and practice, namely Rhetoric, or the building of Discourse. Profoundest thoughts, sublime images, dazzling figures are squandered and lost in an immethodical harangue..... If a natural order is obediently followed the composition will have an abiding charm to yourself as well as to others; you will see that you were the scribe of a higher wisdom than your own, and it will remain to you, like one of Nature's works, pleasant and wholesome, and not, as our books so often are, a disagreeable remembrance to the author."[2]

> "It is much to write sentences; it is more to add method and write out the spirit of your life symmetrically. But to arrange general reflections in their natural order, so that I shall have one

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1. Journal, May 30, 1836
2. Journal, October 21, 1837

> homogeneous piece.....This continuity is for the great.....Such concentration of experience is in every great work, which, though successive in the mind of the master, were primarily combined in his piece."[1]

b. Compression

It was Emerson's ideal to build up a literary style which should be a perfect whole made up of perfectly blended units. One of the first steps to such an art of composition lay, he felt, in doing away with every word which was not of vital importance to the meaning. "The true conciseness of style," he writes in September 5, 1839, "would be such a writing as no dictionaries, but events and character only could illustrate." He adds in a later journal entry:

> "All writing should be selective in order to drop every dead word. Why do you not save out of your speech or thinking only the vital things,- the spirited mot which amused or warmed you when you spoke it,- because of its luck and newness? I have just been reading in this careful book of a most intelligent and learned man, any number of flat conventional words and sentences. If a man would learn to read his own manuscript severely, becoming really a third person, and search only for what interested him he would blot to purpose, and how every page would gain! Then all the words will be sprightly and every sentence a surprise."[2]

This virtue is common to the speech of necessity.

> "Ought not the scholar to convey his meaning in terms as short and strong as the smith and the drover use to convey theirs?....Not only low style, but the lowest style, the lowest classifying words outvalue arguments: as, upstart, dab, prig, granny, lubber, puppy, peacock.....The new virtue of Rhetoric is compression, the science of omitting, which makes good the old verse of Hesiod, 'Fools,

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1. Emerson, Natural History of the Intellect, Powers and Laws of Thought
2. Journal, October 21, 1869

they did not know that half was better than the whole.'"[1]

He distinguishes between compression and an elliptical style:

> "There is a wide difference between compression and an elliptical style. The dense writer has yet ample room and choice or phrase, and even a gamesome mood often, between his noble words. There is no disagreeable contraction in his sentence any more than there is in a human face, where in a square space of a few inches is found room for command and love and frolic and wisdom and for the expression even of great amplitude of surface."[2]

Down to the last of his journal entries we find this art of compression extolled; he regards it as one of the highest literary virtues.

> "The art of the writer is to speak his fact and have done. Let the reader find that he cannot afford to omit any line of your writing, because you have omitted every word that he can spare. You are annoyed - are you? - that your fine friends do not read you. They are better friends than you knew, and have done you the rarest service. Now write so that they must. When it is a disgrace to them that they do not know what you have said, you will hear the echo."[3]

c. Understatement and the Superlative

Another quality which Emerson admired in the speech of men of the street was their terse and forceful understatement. He wished to guard against weak exaggeration in writing and introduce nerve and sinew into his own style.

> "From want of skill to convey quality, he hopes to move admiration by quantity. Language should aim to describe the fact. It is not

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1. Emerson, Natural History of the Intellect, Art and Criticism
2. Journal, May 30, 1839
3. Journal, July, 1862

> enough to suggest and magnify it. Sharper sight would indicate the true line.....I am daily struck with the forcible understatement of people who have no literary habit.....The low expression is strong and agreeable."[1]

He admits that it is a practical impossibility to speak or write without some element of exaggeration, but so far as possible he warns the writer to be on his guard against it.

> "Exaggeration is a law of Nature. As we have not given a peck of apples or potatoes until we have heaped the measure, so Nature sends no creature, no man into the world without adding a small excess of his proper quality.....Every sentence hath some falsehood of exaggeration in it. For the infinite diffuseness refuses to be epigrammatized, the world to be shut in a word. The thought being spoken in a sentence becomes by detachment falsely emphatic."[2]

> "Art lies not in making your object prominent, but in choosing objects that are prominent. To describe adequately is the high power and one of the highest enjoyments of man."[3]

> "For art, for music over thrilled
> The wine-cup shakes, the wine is spilled."[4]

Only the writer whose sentence has been pared lean and true can know the right moment for the use of the superlative and use it with most telling effect.

> "The superlative is as good as the positive, if it be alive. If man loves the conditioned, he also loves the unconditioned.....The objection to unmeasured speech is its lie. All men like an impressive fact."[5]

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1. Emerson, Lectures and Biographical Sketches, The Superlative
2. Journal, September 28, 1841
3. Journal, August 11, 1851
4. Collected Poems, The Poet
5. Emerson, Lectures and Biographical Sketches, The Superlative

d. Repetition

Although Emerson, as we have seen earlier, dislikes a repeating, circuitous style, he recognizes repetition for emphasis as an effective rhetorical device.

> "How remarkable the principle of iteration in rhetoric! We are delighted with it in rhyme, in poetic prose, in song, above all, allowing a line to be not only a burden to the whole song, but as in negro melodies, to be steadily repeated three or four times in immediate succession. Well, what shall we say of a liturgy? What of a litany? What of a Lord's prayer, the burial service, which is echoed and reëchoed from one end of a man's life to the other."[1]

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Yet all that can be said about style will be conditioned by the use each individual writer makes of it. For each man has his own, beyond all principles of rhetoric.

> "Write, that I may know you. Style betrays you, as your eyes do. We detect at once by it whether a writer has a firm grasp on his fact or thought,- exists at the moment for that alone, or whether he has one eye apologizing, deprecatory, turned on his reader.....There is no choice of words for him who clearly sees the truth."[2]

> "A man' style is his intellectual voice, only in part under his control. It has its own proper tone and manner, which, when he is not thinking of it, will always assume. He can mimic the voices of others, he can modulate it with the occasion and the passion, but it has its own individual nature."[3]

In summary and conclusion:

> "The art of writing is the highest of those permitted to man as drawing directly from the

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1. Journal, August 30, 1862
2. Emerson, Letters and Social Aims, Poetry and the Imagination
3. Journal, April, 1826

soul, and the means or material it uses are also of the soul. It brings man into alliance with what is great and eternal. It discloses to him the variety and splendor of his resources. And there is much in literature that draws us with a sublime charm - the superincumbent necessity by which each writer, an infirm capricious, fragmentary soul, is made to utter his part in the chorus of humanity, is enriched by thoughts which flow from all past minds, shares the hopes of all existing minds; so that, whilst the world is made of youthful, helpless children of a day, literature resounds with the music of united vast ideas of affirmation and of moral truth."[1]

"No matter how fine your rhetoric, or how strong is your understanding, no book is good which is not written by the instincts. A fatal frost makes cheerless and undesirable every house where animal heat is not. Cold allegory makes us yawn, whatever elegance it may have."[2]

"Good writing sips the foam from the cup. There are infinite degrees of delicacy in the use of the hands; and good workmen are so distinguished from laborers.....In writing, it is always at the surface, and can chip off a scale where a coarser hand and eye find only solid wall."[3]

"All writing must be in a degree exoteric, written to a human <u>should</u> or <u>would</u>, instead of to the fatal <u>is</u>; this holds even of the bravest, and the sincerest writers. Every writer is a skater and must go partly where he would, and partly where the skates carry him.....Talent amuses, but if your verse has not a necessary and autobiographic basis, though under whatever gay, poetic veils, it shall not waste my time."[4]

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1. Emerson, <u>Natural History of the Intellect</u>, <u>Art and Criticism</u>
2. Journal, August 6, 1849
3. Journal, September 4, 1857
4. Emerson, <u>Letters and Social Aims</u>, <u>Poetry and the Imagination</u>

D. Critical Theory

I do not believe Emerson often considered himself a literary critic. In his own eyes he was a man of letters in a general sense; but his absorbing interest was creative writing. So it is that his views on criticism are usually to be derived from his studies of the nature of beauty, of genius, of literature, and stylistics, rather than from the scattered notes which we find written directly on the matter. Yet the mood of transcendentalism was reform, and Emerson, with his fellow philosophizers in the search for greater reality, found himself dissatisfied with the criticism of his day. The expression of his dissatisfaction and the principles which he believes must be adopted in the reform of the literary critic will constitute the heart of the section which follows.

In the first place Emerson seems somewhat disillusioned by the inadequacy of reviews in his time and there are moods in which he seems convinced of the uselessness of any criticism. It cannot dictate to the writer. He writes in 1845,

> "Criticism misleads. Like Bonaparte's quartermaster; if we listen to him we shall never stir a step. The part you have to take, none but you must know. The critic can never tell you."[1]

And two years later he is much of the same opinion:

> "I have that faith in the necessity of all gifts, that to implore writers to be a little more of this or that were like advising gunpowder to explode gently, or snow to temper its whiteness, or oak trees to be less profuse in leaves and acorns, or poplars

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1. Journal, March 15, 1845

> to try the vinous habit and creep on walls. They do as they can, and they may instruct you equally by their failure as by their talent, that is, they must teach you that the world is farmed out to many contractors, and each arranges all things on his petty task, sacrifices."[1]

In Art and Criticism he says,

> "A man of genius or a work of love and beauty will not come to order, can't be compounded by the best rules, but is always a new and incalculable result, like health. Don't rattle your rules on our ears; we must behave as we can."[2]

Nature offers criticism to the writer in a beauty which no literary art has, as yet, rivalled. If words can stand nature's test of time, they have been well spoken.

> "If a man could go into the country but once, or if it were indulged by God but to a single individual to behold the majesty of nature, I think the credit and magnificence of Art would fall suddenly to the ground."[3]

> "Herein is the legitimation of criticism in the mind's faith, that the poems are a corrupt version of some text in nature with which they ought to be made to tally. A rhyme in one of our sonnets should not be less pleasing than the iterated nodes of a sea-shell, or the ressembling difference of a group of flowers."[4]

> "I hung my verses in the wind,
> Time and tide their faults may find."[5]

Criticism has, to the present, Emerson thinks been concerned with affairs which are no concern of hers. She too must become transcendental.

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1. Journal, July 25, 1847
2. Emerson, Natural History of the Intellect, Art and Criticism
3. Journal, June 9, 1838
4. Emerson, Essays, First and Second Series, The Poet
5. Collected Poems, The Test

"Literature, this magical man-provoking talisman, is in some sort a creature of time. It is begotten by Time on the soul. And one day we shall forget the primer. We must learn to judge books by absolute standards. Criticism, too, must be transcendental. Society wishes to assign subjects and method to its writers. But neither it nor you may intermeddle. You cannot reason at will in this and that other vein, but only as you must. You cannot make quaint combinations and bring to the crucible and alembic of truth things far-fetched or fantastic or popular, but your method and your subject are foreordained in your nature, and in all nature, or ever the earth was - or it has no worth."[1]

If, then, criticism cannot tell an author how to write - what should be its purpose? Interpretation may surely come within its province. Let the critic make known to the people what is good. But let him, at the same time, not waste his force in exposing poor literature; if it is poor, Time will insure its rejection.

"Do not waste yourself in rejection; do not bark against the bad, but chant the beauty of the good."[2]

Let the critic not seek to explain the beauty of a work of art in terms of classics which have gone before, but examine its own merits.

"All that gives currency still to any book published today by Little and Brown is the remains of faith in the breast of men that not adroit book-makers, but the inextinguishable soul of the Universe, reports of itself in articulate discourse through this and that other man, today, as of old. The ancients strongly expressed their sense of the unmanageableness of these words of the god, by saying that the god made his priest insane, took him hither and thither as leaves are whirled by the tempest."[1]

"In writing a review put in only that you have to say, only the things, and leave the consideration

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1. Journal, October 11, 1839
2. Journal, September 4, 1841

> of the Greeks and Romans and the universal history quite out. Stop when you have done. And stop when you have begun, if it is not something to you."[1]
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> "I cultivate ever my humanity. This I would always propitiate, and judge of a book as a peasant does, not as a book by pedantic and individual measures, but by number and weight, counting the things that are in it."[2]
>
> "The most important difference in criticism is whether one writes from life, or from a literary point of view. 'Tis difficult for a writer not to be bookish and conventional. If he writes from manly experience and feeling, his page is a power."[3]

In reading critically, first impressions are of primary importance. These should be held to and analyzed.

> "In reading books, as in seeing men, one may well keep, if he can, his first thoughts; for they will soon be written over by the details of argument and sentiment in the book; and yet they are a juster judgment of the book than a digest of the particular merits can yield."[4]
>
> "Of all the persons who read good books and converse about them, the greater part are content to say, I was pleased; or I was displeased; it made me active or inactive; and rarely does one eliminate and express the peculiar quality of that life which the book awoke in him. So rare is a general reflection."[5]

Meditation concerning one's impressions of a work of art will yield more genuine criticism than any amount of reference to literary standards. This method alone will bring out the essential quality and spirit of the piece in hand; and this alone is what criticism should be concerned with.

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1. Journal, November 3, 1837
2. Journal, March 14, 1836
3. Journal, October 20, 1860
4. Journal, March, 1845
5. Journal, September 11, 1841

"I require that a poem should impress me so that after I have shut the book it shall recall me to itself, or that passages should. And inestimable is the criticism of memory as a corrective to first impressions. We are dazzled at first by new words and brilliancy of color which occupy the fancy and deceive the judgment. But all this is easily forgotten. Later, the thought, the happy image which expressed it and which was a true experience of the poet, recurs to mind, and sends me back in search of the book."[1]

"I please myself rather with contemplating the penumbra of the thing than the thing itself."[2]

"We ought to credit literature with much more than the bare word gives us. I have just been reading poems which now in memory shine with a certain steady, warm, autumnal light. That is not in their grammatical construction which they give me. If I analyze the sentences, it eludes me, but it is the genius and suggestion of the whole."[3]

"Criticism is an art when it does not stop at the words of the poet, but looks at the order of his thoughts and the essential quality of his mind. Then the critic is poet. 'Tis a question not of talents but of tone; and not particular merits, but the mood of mind into which one and another can bring us."[4]

"'Every Scripture is to be interpreted by the same spirit which gave it forth', is the fundamental law of criticism."[5]

Criticism which is truly transcendental will rid itself of egoism and will always look a little beyond the work before it, creating standards for the future.

"Literary Criticism, how beautiful to me - and I am shocked to detect such omnipresent egotism in my things. My prayer is that I may be never

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1. Emerson, Letters and Social Aims, Poetry and the Imagination
2. Journal, September 8, 1833
3. Emerson, Natural History of the Intellect, Modern Literature
4. Ibid., Art and Criticism
5. Emerson, Nature, Section on Language

deprived of a fact, but be always so rich in objects of study as never to feel this impoverishment of remembering myself."[1]

"A curious example of the rudeness and inaccuracy of thought is the inability to distinguish between the private and the universal consciousness. I never make that blunder when I write, but the critics who read impute their confusion to me."[2]

"When we adhere to the ideal of the poet, we have our difficulties even with Milton and Homer. Milton is too literary and Homer too literal and historical."[3]

"Our best praise is given to what they aimed and promised, not to the actual result.....The real value of the Iliad or the Transfiguration is as signs of power; billows or ripples they are of the stream of tendency; tokens of the everlasting effort to produce, which even in its worst estate the soul betrays."[4]

To such criticism the poet may well give heed if he be worthy of his high office.

"The poet, as the craftsman, is only interested in the praise accorded to him and not in the censure, though it be just. And the poor poet harkens only to that, and rejects the censure as proving incapacity in the critic. But the poet cultivated becomes a stockholder in both companies.....As soon as he sides with his critic against himself, with joy, he is a cultivated man."[5]

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1. Journal, June 16, 1842
2. Journal, April 6, 1848
3. Emerson, Essays, First and Second Series, The Poet
4. Ibid., Art
5. Emerson, Conduct of Life, Culture

E. Emerson's Practice of Criticism

Emerson's audiences urged him from time to time to speak on literary subjects, and although he preferred more general topics as his first publications show, he obliged them in this respect. So it is that we find many of the casually jotted down journal impressions of authors and books patched together into lectures. It is from these two sources, then, journals and lectures, that we may study Emerson's practical application of his theory of literary criticism.

I have discussed Emerson's opinion of the more important of his American literary contemporaries under the section on his Literary Friends; it remains, however, to examine his opinion of American literature as a whole.

1. American Literature

It seems that a paragraph or two in this section might well be added on Emerson's critical views of the literature in his own country.

We have seen in the first section that America had advanced more rapidly in material welfare than she had in culture; that in her art she was often subservient to England. Much of the exaggeration in Emerson's writings on self-reliance can be accounted for by an understanding of the background attitude against which he protested. He is impatient to have America cast aside false reverences, to trust her own native genius, and to begin to build her own art. His address, The American

Scholar, is the best summary of his attitude, and has long been known as "the American declaration of literary independence." An analysis of this point may be found in various other sources. He cries out against the complacent national pride in mechanical arts:

> "What have these arts done for the character, for the worth of mankind? Are men better? 'Tis sometimes questioned whether morals have not declined as these arts have ascended. Here are great arts and little men.....Every victory over matter ought to recommend to man the worth of his nature.....'Tis too plain that with the material power the moral progress has not kept pace. It appears that we have not made a judicious investment. Works and days were offered us, and we took works."[1]

The American genius seems to lag and to lack vitality:

> "Allston's pictures are Elysian; fair, serene, but unreal. I extend the remark to all American geniuses. Irving, Bryant, Greenough, Everett, Channing, even Webster in his recorded eloquence, all lack nerve and dagger."[2]

He analyzes the whole situation in his journal in the same year that Nature is published.

> "Why is there no genius in the Fine Arts in this country? In sculpture Greenough is picturesque; in painting, Allston; in Poetry, Bryant; in Eloquence, Channing; in Fiction, Irving, Cooper; in all, the feminine, no character.
>
> 1st reason: Influence of Europe, mainly of England. All genius is fatal to genius. Come not too near: keep off. Sculpture did not spring up here, but was imported. Our painter is the most successful imitator of the Titianesque.
>
> 2nd reason: They are not called out by the necessity of the people. Poetry, music, sculpture, painting were all enlisted in the service of Patriotism and Religion. The statue was to be worshipped, the picture also. The poem was a confession of faith. A vital faith built the cathedrals of

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1. Emerson, Society and Solitude, Works and Days
2. Journal, May 26, 1839

Europe. But who cares to see a poem of Bryant's or a statue of Greenough's or a picture of Allston? The people never see them. The mind of the race has taken another direction - Property. Patriotism, none. Religion has no enthusiasm. It is external, prudential.

But these are only statements of a fact; not explanation of it.

I believe the destitution is merely apparent. It is sickly and effeminate to arraign. The sense of Beauty springs ever new; the sentiment of Good; the Idea of Truth. And every age has its own forms for them. The Greek was the age of observation; the Middle Age, that of fact and thought; ours, that of reflection and ideas.

That people are as hungry now as ever is proved by the success of Scott and Byron.

What can be done by us:

1. Redeem them from imitation; Jacobinism will.
2. Preach the nature of things."[1]

He reëchoes this thought in his editor's address in the first number of the Massachusetts Quarterly Review in December, 1847.

"There is no speech heard but that of auctioneers, newsboys, and the caucus. Where is the great breath of the New World, the voice of aboriginal nations opening new eras with hymns of lofty cheer? Our books and fine arts are imitations; there is a fatal incuriosity and disinclination in our educated men to new studies and the interrogation of Nature. We have taste, critical talent, good professors, good commentators, but a lack of male energy."[2]

In part he blames this state of affairs upon the reading public who do not expect enough.

"Our people have no proper expectations in regard to literary men; they expect a practical reformer.....Look at literary New England; one would think it was a national fast."[3]

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1. Journal, September 28, 1836
2. Emerson, Miscellanies
3. Journal, May 5, 1847

Because of this, only the conventional life is considered. There is no expression of high national feeling in any American poetry, state papers, lecture-rooms, or churches.[1] America is too ready to acclaim talent; we never wait for genius which is of slower growth. In our impatience to give the world evidence of our literary production we have not taken the time to produce a style worthy of the name.

> "It is the levity of this country to forgive everything to talent. If a man show cleverness, rhetorical skill, bold front in the forum or senate people clap their hands without asking more. We have a juvenile love of smartness, of showy speech. We like faculty that can rapidly be coined into money, and society seems to be in conspiracy to utilize every gift prematurely and pull down genius to lucrative talent.....All is condoned if I can write a good song or novel."[2]

> "Our conventional style of writing is now so trite and poor, so little idiomatic, that we have several foreigners who write in our journals in a style not to be distinguished from their native colleagues. As Dr. Follen, Maroncelli, Dr. Lieber, Graeter. But whatever draws on the language of conversation will not be so easily imitated, but will speak as the stream flows."[3]

Poetry is likewise still in the imitative stage.

> "Our poetry reminds me of the catbird, who sings so affectedly and vaingloriously to me near Walden. Very sweet and musical! very various! fine execution! but so conscious, and <u>such a performer</u>! Not a note of his own, except at last Miou, miou."[4]

Yet he believes that contemporary movements for reform and the desire for education will in time bring the promised

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1. Journal, January, 1844
2. Emerson, <u>Natural History of the Intellect</u>, <u>Powers and Laws of Thought</u>
3. Journal, June 6, 1839
4. Journal, May 16, 1842

reward. We must, perhaps, not expect too much all at once. He writes to Carlyle of the attendance at lectures on literary subjects in April, 1835:

> "Boston contains some genuine taste for literature, and a good deal of traditional reverence for it. For a few years past, we have had, every winter, several courses of lectures, scientific, political, miscellaneous, and even some purely literary, which were well attended. Some lectures on Shakespeare were crowded and even I found much indulgence in reading, last winter, some Biographical Lectures which were meant for theories or portraits of Luther, Michelangelo, Milton, George Fox, Burke. These courses are really given under the auspices of Societies.....But in a few instances individuals have undertaken courses of lectures and have been well paid.....We knew enough here of Goethe and Schiller to have some interest in German literature. A respectable German here, Dr. Follen, has given lectures to a good class upon Schiller. I am quite sure that G's name would not stimulate the curiosity of scores of persons. On English literature, a much larger class would have some preparedness."

Something, he believes, must surely follow in the wake of the Transcendentalists.

> "Our American Literature and spiritual history are, we confess, in the optative mood; but who so knows these seething brains, these admirable radicals, these unsocial worshippers.....Will believe that this heresy cannot pass away without leaving its mark."[1]

> "We forget in taking up a contemporary book that we have seen the house that is building and not the house that is built. A glance at my own manuscripts might teach me that all my poems are unfinished, heaps of sketches but no masterpiece, yet when I open a printed volume of poems I look imperatively for art."[2]

For his contemporaries he urges even more earnestly

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1. Emerson, Letters and Social Aims, The Transcendentalist
2. Journal, October 23, 1841

the doctrine of independence, of self reliance.

> "Inspiration is to be found now in the place where you are."-

he tells these restless literary youths of his day.

> "Travel will not bring you nearer the Over-Soul; the Past will not give you a truer style. Write today the truths which come to you when you feel yourself nearest the World-Spirit. They will be universally true and you will have discovered the force of your own genius."
>
> "Why need we copy the Doric or the Gothic model? Beauty, convenience, grandeur of thought, and quaint expression are as near to us as to any, and if the American Artist will study with hope and love the precise thing to be done by him, considering the climate, the soil, the length of the day, the wants of the people, the habit and form of government, he will create a house in which all these will find themselves fitted, and taste and sentiment will be satisfied also."[1]

2. English Literature

It was through English literature chiefly that Emerson formed his appreciation for good books and consequently there is more comment upon English writing in his journal than upon any other kind. Here we can study his practice of criticism most thoroughly.

He has caught the spirit of much that is essential to English Literature in paragraphs like the following:

> "A strong common sense, which it is not easy to unseat or disturb, marks the English mind for a

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1. Emerson, Essays, First and Second Series, Self-Reliance

> thousand years: a rude strength newly applied to thought, as of sailors and soldiers who had lately learned to read. They have no fancy, and never are surprised into a covert or witty word, such as pleased the Athenians and Italians, and was convertible into a fable not long after; but they delight in strong, earthy expression, not mistakable, coarsely true to the human body, and, though spoken among princes, equally fit and welcome to the mob. This homeliness, veracity, and plain style appear in the earliest extant works and in the latest. It imports into songs and ballads the smell of the earth, the breath of cattle, and, like a Dutch painter, seeks a household charm, though by pails and pans.....Hudibras has the hard mentality,- keeping the truth at once to the senses and to the intellect. It is not less seen in poetry. Chaucer's hard painting of the Canterbury pilgrims satisfies the senses. Shakespeare, Spenser, and Milton in their loftiest ascents have this national grip and exactitude of mind.....
>
> "Mixture is the secret of the English island; and in their dialect, the male principle is the Saxon, the female, the Latin; and they are combined in every discourse. A good writer, if he has indulged in a Roman roundness, makes haste to chasten and nerve his period by English monosyllables.....
>
> "There is a hygienic simpleness, rough vigor and closeness to the matter in hand even in the second and third class of writers; and, I think, in the common style of the people, as one finds it in the citation of wills, letters and public documents; in proverbs and forms of speech. The more hearty and sturdy expression may indicate that the savageness of the Norsemen was not all gone.....The English shrink from a generalization.....The English genius is wise and rich, but it lives on its capital. It is retrospective. How can it discern and hail the new forms that are looming up on the horizon, new and gigantic thoughts which cannot dress themselves out of any old wardrobe of the past."[1]

It may well have been from his admiration for English literature that Emerson came to give simplicity, understatement, and the low style so important a place in his theory of Stylistics.

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1. Emerson, <u>English Traits</u>, <u>Literature</u>

Above all other types of writing, Emerson's praise goes out to English Poetry. Shakespeare, the greatest poet in the world in his judgment, was of this land and is representative of its genius.

> "Is it not true, what we so reluctantly hear, that men are but the mouthpiece of a great progressive Destiny, in as much as regards literature? I rather asked, is not the age gone by of the great splendour of English poetry, and will it not be impossible for any age soon to vie with the pervading etherial poesy of Herbert, Herrick, Milton, Ben Jonson; at least to represent anything like their peculiar form of ravishing verse? It is the head of human poetry. Homer and Virgil and Dante and Tasso and Byron and Wordsworth have powerful genius whose amplest claims I cheerfully acknowledge. But 'tis a pale ineffectual fire when theirs shines. They would lie on my shelf in undisturbed honour for years, if these Saxon lays stole on my ear. I have for them an affectionate admiration I have for nothing else. They set me on speculations. They move my wonder at myself. They suggest the great endowment of the spiritual man. They open glimpses of the heaven that is in the intellect. When I am caught by a magic word and drop the book to explore the infinite charm - to run along the line of that ray - I feel the longevity of the mind; I admit the evidence of the immortality of the soul. Well, as I said, I am afraid the season of this rare fruit is irrecoverably past; that the earth has made such a mutation of its nodes, that the heat will never again reach that Hesperian garden in which alone these apricots and pomegranates grew."[1]

> "It is fair (is it not?) to say that the ideal of any people is in their best writers, sculptors, painters, and builders, in their greatest heroes and creators in any and every kind. In Hamlet, in Othello, and Coriolanus, in Troilus and Cressida, we shall pick up the scattered bones of the English Osiris, as they haunted the mind of the greatest poet of the world; and he was English. But we pause expectant before the genius of Shakespeare as if his biography were not yet written

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1. Journal, September 11, 1828

> and cannot be written until the problem of the whole English race is solved.
>
> The English genius never parts with its materialistic tendency, and even in its inspirations is materialistic. Milton, Shakespeare, Chaucer, Spenser, Herbert, who carried it to its greatest height, are bound to satisfy the senses and the understanding, as well as the Reason. If the question is asked whether the English repudiate thought we remember there is always a minority in England who entertain whatever speculations the highest muse has attempted. No brain has dallied with finer imaginings than Shakespeare (yet with mathematical accuracy), no richer thoughted man than Bacon, no holier than Milton or Herbert."[1]

a. Early Literature

This earthiness which Emerson so delights in in English writing is a characteristic particularly of the early literature. The Romantic tendencies of his time may have led him to seek this out, but I think the native Emersonian temperament would have found it good apart from any influence. He writes in his journal:

> "The Saxon and Norse poetry are warm with the faith and sentiment of the time and the verbs are solid as church-walls. The religion, to be sure, wrote the Chronicles, but the people believed the religion, which was alive, and served them, freed the serf, defended women, and allowed a mediation and poor-men's-friend in the ecclesiastic power. The poetry is imaginative, and the churches are great and poetic."[2]

> "It costs the early bard little talent to chant more impressively than the later, more cultivated poets. His advantage is that his words are things, each the lucky sound which described the fact, and we listen to him as we do to the Indian, or the hunter, or miner, each of whom represents his facts as accurately as the cry of the wolf or the eagle tells the forest or the air they inhabit. The original force, the direct smell of the earth

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1. Journal, January, 1853
2. Journal, September, 1852

> or the sea is in these ancient poems, the Sagas of the North, the Nibelungen Lied, the songs and ballads of the English and Scotch."[1]

He notes the deep sadness which so many critics have found characteristic of the Saxon race -

> "Melancholy cleaves to the Saxon mind as closely as to the tones of an Aeolian harp."[2]

The ballads of the fifteenth century and earlier likewise appeal to him because of their closeness to the life of the people. A journal entry of September 4, 1857, shows this well.

> "The ballads got their excellence, as perhaps Homer and the Cid did, by being conventional stories conventionally created, with conventional rhymes and tunes and images, done over and over until at last all the strokes were right, and the faults were thrown away."

Chaucer was one of Emerson's favorite poets and was recommended to all the young people who sought advice in their reading.

"Read Chaucer," he said to one of them;

> "In a day you will get into his language, and then you will like him. Humour the lines a little; they are full of music."[3]

Then in the memorable Emerson voice he recited to the young men the poem beginning, "Flee from the press and dwell with soothfastnesse."[3] In another connection he writes in his journal, November 4, 1838:

> "The religion of the early English wits is anomalous; so devout, and so blasphemous in the same breath. The merriest tale concludes:

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1. Emerson, Letters and Social Aims, Poetry and the Imagination
2. Journal, November 14, 1835
3. Woodbury, Talks with Ralph Waldo Emerson, pp. 49-50

> Thus endeth my tale of Januarie
> God blesse us, and his moder, Seinte Marie.
> Chaucer's canon had such wit and art, that he could turn upside down all the ground between here and Canturbury, and pave it with silver and gold, yet was, 'his overest sloppe not worth a mite.'"

And in July 16, 1842:

> "Chaucer is such a poet as I have described Saadi possessing that advantage of being the most cultivated man of the times. So he speaks always sovereignly and cheerfully."

b. The Sixteenth Century

(1) Shakespeare

Elizabeth's age of literary men was a miracle to Emerson as it has been for all men who study English literature.

> "There is a wonderful prodigality about the English genius in the sixteenth century. Their poets had marvellous stores to draw from, by simple force of mind equalizing themselves with the science of ours. There was a posset or drink called October, and they in like manner knew how to distil a whole September with harvests and astronomy into their verses."[1]

But he has little time for the lesser men of the period. Shakespeare dominates completely his thought of the time. From the earliest journal entries to the latest Shakespeare is analyzed and rejoiced in. Shakespeare, more than anyone else, contributes to Emerson's conception of the ideal poet. In November 9, 1838, he writes in his journal:

> "Read Lear yesterday and Hamlet today with new wonder, and mused much on the great soul whose authentic signs flashed on my sight in the broad continuous daylight of these poems. Especially

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1. Journal, April 21, 1852

> I wonder at the perfect reception this wit and immense knowledge of life and intellectual superiority find in us all in connection with our utter incapacity to produce anything like it. The superior tone of Hamlet in all the conversations how perfectly preserved, without any mediocrity, much less any dulness in the other speakers.....What less can be said of the perfect mastery, as by a superior being, of the conduct of the drama, as the free introduction of this capital advice to the players; the commanding good sense which never retreats except before the godhead which inspires certain passages,- the more I think of it, the more I wonder. No Parthenon, no sculpture, no picture, no architecture can be named beside this. All this is perfectly visible to me and to many,- the wonderful truth and mastery of this work, of these works,- yet for our lives could not I, or any man, or all men, produce anything comparable to one scene in Hamlet or Lear. With all my admiration of this life-like picture,- set me to producing a match for it, and I should instantly depart into mouthing rhetoric. .....One other fact Shakespeare presents us: that not by books are great poets made. Somewhat, and much he unquestionably owes to his books; but you could not find in his circumstances the history of his poem. It was made without hands in his invisible world. A mightier magic than any learning, the deep logic of cause and effect he studied; its roots were cast so deep, therefore it flung out its branches so high."

The next evening he adds:

> "Shakespeare fills us with wonder the first time we approach him. We go away and work and think for years, and come again,- he astonishes us anew. Then having drank deeply and saturated us with his genius, we lose sight of him for another period of years. By and by we return, and there he stands, immeasurable as at first. We have grown wiser, but only that we should see him wiser than ever. He ressembles a high mountain and thinks he shall quickly near it and pass it and leave it behind. But he journeys all day till noon, till night. There still is the dim mountain close by him, having scarce altered its bearings since the morning light."[1]

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1. Journal, November 10, 1838

Nearly all else that is of importance in his appreciation of Shakespeare is contained in that essay in Representative Men called Shakespeare; or, the Poet. Shakespeare was the librarian and historiographer of his period; his genius was in the fact that he lived so deeply and understandingly the life of his contemporaries that it came to have universal significance for him and he expressed its deepest meaning.[1]

> "It was not possible to write the history of Shakespeare till now; for he is the father of German literature; it was on the introduction of Shakespeare into German, by Lessing, and the translation of his works by Wieland and Schlegel, that the rapid burst of German literature was most intimately connected. It was not until the nineteenth century, whose speculative genius is a sort of living Hamlet, that the tragedy of Hamlet could find such wondering readers. Now literature, philosophy, and thought, are Shakespearized. His mind is the horizon beyond which we cannot see. Our ears are educated to music by his rhythm.....
>
> For executive faculty, for creation, Shakespeare is unique. No man can imagine better. He was the farthest reach of subtlety compatible with an individual self.....With this wisdom of life, is the equal endowment of imaginative and of lyric power.....Things are mirrored in his poetry without loss or blur: he could paint the fine with precision, the great with compass; the tragic and comic indifferently, and without any distortion or favor.....His means are as admirable as his ends; every subordinate invention, by which he helps himself to connect some irreconcilable opposites, is a poem too.....He loves virtue, not for its obligation, but for its grace.....Shakespeare, Homer, Dante, Chaucer, saw the splendor of meaning that plays over the visible world: that these things bore a second and finer harvest to the mind, being emblems of its thoughts, and conveying in all their natural history a certain mute commentary on human life."[1]

The reality of Shakespeare's characters excites his

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1. Emerson, Representative Men, Shakespeare

comment:

> "Shakespeare's creations indicate no sort of anxiety to be understood. There is the Cleopatra, an irregular, unfinished, glorious, sinful character, sink or swim, there she is, and not one in the thousands of his readers apprehends the noble dimensions of the heroine. Then Ariel, Hamlet, and all; all done in sport with the free, daring pencil of a master of the world. He leaves his children with God."

Despite some early qualms as to certain sensual aspects in Shakespeare's dominion,[1] he finds him, at length, deeply moral as a true poet should be:

> "One thing strikes me in the sonnets, which in their way seem as wonderful as the plays, and perhaps are even more valuable to the analysis of the genius of Shakespeare, and that is the assimilating power of passion that turns all things to its own nature.....And then see the immortality of the human spirit in them, for who but an eternal creature could so think and express himself as in 'If my dear love were but the child of state'..... And listen to the stern morality that seems to inform them all and to be present in the eye of the poet, even when contradicted in the expression: but present in spirit and letter."[2]

> "Shakespeare's fun is as wise as his earnest; its foundations are below the frost; his is a moral muse simply from its depth; and I value the intermixture of the common and the transcendental as in Nature."[3]

His last public comment upon Shakespeare's genius is made at the Saturday Club in Boston during their celebration of the three hundredth anniversary of his birth in 1864. He concludes:

> "We pause expectant before the genius of Shakespeare - as if his biography were not yet

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1. Journal, March 9, 1822
2. Journal, October 24, 1831
3. Journal, August 6, 1849

> written; until the problem of the whole English race is solved.....Shakespeare by his transcendent reach of thought, so unites the extremes, that, whilst he has kept the theatre now for three centuries, and, like the street-bible, furnishes sayings to the market, courts of law, the senate, and common discourse,- he is yet to all wise men the companion of the closet."

(2) Bacon

About Bacon, who is supposed to have had so great an influence over Emerson's essays that, together with Montaigne, he has been called their father, there is surprisingly little comment. An entry in one of his earliest journals records the impression made on him by the style of the Novum Organum:

> "I have been reading the Novum Organum. Lord Bacon is indeed a wonderful writer; he condenses an unrivaled degree of matter in one paragraph. He never suffers himself 'to swerve from the direct forthright' or to babble or speak unguardedly on his proper topic, and withal writes with more melody and rich cadence than any writer (I had almost said, of England) on a similar subject."[1]

Four years later the essays appeal to him on his own ground - love of aphorism.

> "There is another sort of book.....which soon or late gets a foothold in popular esteem. I allude to those books which collect and embody the wisdom of their times, and so mark the stages of human improvement. Such are the Proverbs of Solomon, the Essays of Montaigne, and eminently the Essays of Bacon."[2]

At fifty-one he acknowledges his indebtedness to the essayist:

> "If I reckon up my debts by particulars to English books, how fast they reduce themselves to a few authors and how conspicuous Shakespeare, Bacon, and Milton become."[3]

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1. Journal, August 8, 1820
2. Journal, October, 1824
3. Journal, September 5, 1855

Emerson may well have learned his preference for condensation, force, and epigram in his reading of Bacon.

c. The Seventeenth Century

Emerson finds himself at home in the seventeenth century of English literature. Here belongs Milton, who was early and late one of his great men; here are the Puritan poets with whom he had so much in common and the writers of a style which showed a love for the classics such as he believed he had.

> "The old writers, such as Montaigne, Milton, Browne, when they had put down their thoughts, jumped into the book bodily themselves, so that we have all that is left of them in our shelves; there is not a pinch of dust beside."[1]

> "The incisive style of all English writers from A.D. 1600 to 1700 seems no longer attainable. It resembles the force of words of children. These old garden books like Evelyn have it. 'Tis a kind of baby-talk, which we can no longer use."[2]

> "Izaak Walton and all the writers of his age betray their reading in Greek literature. Plutarch, Plato, and the Greek philosophers, especially of the Stoic sect, nourish them."[3]

(1) Milton

Milton reveals the beauty of the moral; he was a welcome voice to the young Emerson occupied with school-teaching:

> "Material beauty perishes or palls. Intellectual beauty limits admiration to seasons and ages. .....But moral beauty is lovely, imperishable, perfect.....None that can understand Milton's Comus can read it without warming to the holy emotions it panegyrizes. I would freely give all

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1. Journal, August, 1848
2. Journal, August 28, 1862
3. Journal, September 5, 1854

> I ever hoped to be, even when my air-blown hopes were brilliant and glorious,- .....to have given down that sweet strain to posterity to do good in a golden way."[1]

The young traveller carries a book of Milton's poems with him on his trip fo Europe. He writes in his shipboard journal:

> "I comforted myself at midnight with Lycidas. What marble beauty in the classic pastoral. I should like well to see an analysis of the pleasure it gives. That were criticism for the gods."[2]

Emerson lectures to his class at Harvard on Milton's true superiority:

> "It is the prerogative of this great man to stand at this hour foremost of all men in literary history, and of all men, in the power to inspire. Virtue goes out of him into others. Whilst Milton was conscious of possessing this intellectual voice, penetrating through its melodious undulations forward through the coming world, he knew that his mastery of language was a secondary power, and he respected the mysterious source whence it had its spring; namely, clear conceptions and a devoted heart.....This native honor never forsook him. It is the spirit of Comus, the loftiest song in the praise of chastity that is in any language.....To this antique heroism, Milton added the genius of the Christian sanctity.....A man whom labor or danger never deterred from whatever efforts a love of the supreme interests of man prompted. For are we not the better; are not all men fortified by the remembrance of the bravery, the purity, the temperance, the toil, the independence and the angelic devotion of this man, who, in a revolutionary age, taking counsel only of himself, endeavored, in his writings and in his life, to carry out the life of man to new heights of spiritual grace and dignity, without abatement of its strength?"[3]

There was only one drawback: "Milton was too learned," writes

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1. Journal, February 20, 1824
2. Journal, January 16, 1833
3. Emerson, Natural History of the Intellect, Milton

Emerson, "though I hate to say it. It wrecked his originality. He was more indebted to the Hebrew than even to the Greek."[1] Who, in an age less classical in its interests than the seventeenth century, does not agree with this judgment.

(2) The Puritan Writers

George Herbert was a name frequently on Emerson's lips when he spoke of this age of literature. The same purity of moral intent shone in his verses and made them beautiful to the New Englander. It was a moral intent which differed from new world Puritanism as Emerson himself saw. He writes in his journal on March 21, 1836:

> "I thought yesterday morning of the sweetness of that fragrant piety which is almost departed out of the world, which makes the genius of A - Kempis, Scorigal, Herbert, Jeremy Taylor. It is a beautiful mean, equidistant from the hard, sour, iron Puritan on one side, and the empty negation of the Unitarian on the other. It is the spirit of David and of Paul."

He marvels, as Herbert's readers still do at the genius which expressed itself truly through an almost stiflingly rigid conventional pattern:

> "Read Herbert. What eggs, ellipses, acrostics, forward, backward and across, could not his liquid genius run into, and be genius still and angelic love?"[2]

> "I often make the criticism on my friend Herbert's diction, that his thought has that heat as actually to fuse the words, so that language is wholly flexible in his hands and his rhyme never stops the progress of the sense. And, in general, according to the elevation of the soul

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1. Journal, August 17, 1834
2. Journal, July 1, 1838

> will the power over language always, be and lively thought: that you only get up the temperature of the thought."[1]

Cowley and Donne, on much the same grounds, come in for their share of Emerson's admiration.

> "Cowley and Donne are philosophers. To their insight there is no trifle, but philosophy or insight is so much the habit of their minds that they can hardly see, as a poet should, the beautiful forms and colors of things, as a chemist may be less alive to the picturesque. At the same time their poems, like life, afford the chance of richest instruction amid frivolous and familiar objects; the loose and the grand, religion and mirth stand in surprising neighborhood, and like the words of great men, without cant."[2]

Sir Thomas Browne also receives his due reward for hours of insight:

> "How inward he is! What a true example of the noble daring of a thinker who sees that the soul alone is real, and that it is a true wisdom to launch abroad into its deep, and push his way as far as any glimmer of light is given, though the element and the path be in wild contradiction to any use or practice of this world."[3]

Ben Jonson and his followers

Ben Jonson was an early favorite of Emerson's because of his forcefulness and the grace of his songs. Two journal entries will give the best of Emerson's comment on the worth of his style:

> "Beautiful songs Ben Jonson can write, and his vocabulary is so rich, and when he pleases, so smooth, that he seems to be prosing with a design to relieve and display better the bright parts of the piece. Then he shows himself master of the

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1. Journal, September 15, 1831
2. Journal, July 17, 1837
3. Journal, November 25, 1838

higher, the moral taste, and enriches himself occasionally with those unquestionable gems which none but the sons of God possess. Strange that among his actors, and not the first, is Will Shakespeare. He never was dull to relieve his brilliant parts. He is all light, sometimes terrestrial, sometimes celestial, but all light."[1]

"As I read Ben Jonson the other even it seemed to me, as before, that there is a striking resemblance between the poetry of his age and the painting of the old masters in the depth of the style. With all the frolic and freedom, the poetry is not superficial, and with all the weight of thought, it is not solemn. The beauty is necessary, and the shadows are transparent."[2]

Robert Herrick, the gayest of the cavaliers, finds his way into Emerson's heart for reasons which the critic himself shall tell you:

"Herrick is a remarkable example of the low style. He is, therefore, a good example of the modernness of an old English writer. So Latimer, so Chaucer, so the Bible.....He has, and knows that he has, a noble idiomatic English, a perfect, plain style, from which he can soar to a fine, lyric delicacy, or descend to coarsest sarcasm, without losing his firm footing."[3]

"Herrick's merit is the simplicity and manliness of his utterance, and only rarely the weight of his sentences. He has, and is conscious of having, a noble idiomatic use of his English, a perfect plain-style from which he can at any time soar to a fine lyric delicacy, or descend to the coarsest sarcasms without losing his firm footing. But this power of speech was accompanied by an assurance of fame."[4]

"Reading Herrick, I feel how rich is Nature. This art of poetry,- I see that here is work and beauty enough to justify a man for quitting all else and sitting down with the Muses. Did not

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1. Journal, September 25, 1833
2. Journal, June 22, 1839
3. Emerson, Natural History of the Intellect, Art and Criticism
4. Journal, May 16, 1835

Caesar say to the Egyptian priest, Come, I will quit army, Empire, and all if you will show me the fountains of the Nile? Well, all topics are indifferent: you may reach the centre by boring a shaft from any point on the surface, with equal ease. And yet in this instance of poetry the provocation is not that the Law is there, but the means are alluring."[1]

Others

These represent Emerson's enthusiasms in the seventeenth century. But his brief comments on a few other writers of the period are interesting:

Beaumont and Fletcher

"In the elder English dramatists, and mainly in the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher, there is a constant recognition of gentility, as if a noble behaviour were as easily marked in the society of their age, as color is in our American population.....In harmony with this delight in personal advantages, there is in their plays a certain heroic cast of character and dialogue. I do not readily remember any poem, play, sermon, novel, or oration that our press vents in the 1st years, which goes to the same tune. We have a great many flutes and flageolets, but not often the sound of any fife."[2]

Richard Hooker

"Richard Hooker wrote good prose in 1580. Here it is good prose in 1835. There have not been forty persons of his nation from that time to this who could write better."[3]

Clarendon

"Clarendon alone among the English authors (though I think I see the love of Clarendon in Burke) has successfully transplanted the Italian superlative style."[4]

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1. Journal, December 18, 1841
2. Essays, First and Second Series, Heroism
3. Journal, July 24, 1835
4. Journal, August 8, 1837

c. The Eighteenth Century

The eighteenth century never finds its way very far into Emerson's thought. We are prone to overlook the century just before our own and although Emerson would rarely admit himself a Romanticist, he had little sympathy with neo-classic standards of excellence. The well-known eighteenth century attitude toward nature as secondary to art, alone, would have given a New England Transcendentalist grounds for prejudice. We find Emerson's comments on this period somewhat sketchy.

Although the idea of the Spectator Papers appealed to him and he at one time wished to start a similar publication of comment upon manners, although he cites Johnson as one of the few writers who possess "native wit" and sometimes quotes from him, although he approved of Pope's aphoristic turn, he can give neither Addison, Johnson, or Pope a high place on his reading list. Their bookishness disgusts him:

> "Pope and Johnson and Addison write as if they had never seen the face of the country, but had only read of trees and rivers in books."[1]

George Crabbe he has only one good word for:

> "Crabbe knew men, but to read one of his poems seems to me all one with taking a dose of medicine."[2]

He laments the materialism of the age unbalanced as it seems to be over higher faculties. Chesterfield is merely a Sophist to him and Walpole lacks any touch of nature:

> "I told Landor I thought it an argument of

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1. Journal, July 29, 1837
2. Journal, July 21, 1837

> weak understanding in Lord Chesterfield, his slippery morality. It is inexcusable in any man who pretends to greatness to confound moral distinctions. True genius, whatever faults of action it may have, never does. Shakespeare never does, though a loose liver. But such fry as Beaumont and Fletcher, and Massinger, do continually. And Chesterfield did. Well for him if he had often thought and spoken as when he said, 'I judge by every man's truth of his degree of understanding.'"[1]
>
> "Horace Walpole, whose letters I read so attentively in the past summer, is a type of the dominant Englishman at this day. He has taste, common sense, love of facts, impatience of humbug, love of history, love of splendour, love of justice, and the sentiment of honour among gentlemen, but no life whatever of the higher faculties, no faith, no hope, no aspiration, no question even touching the secret of nature."[2]

Burke's powers of oratory made their own appeal to him and gain a place in the quotations of Emerson journals at infrequent intervals, but they do not tempt him to any passages of critical analysis.

> "Burke is a rhetoric, a robe to be always admired for the beauty with which he drapes facts, as we love light, or rather colour, which clothes all things. What rich temperance, what costly textures, what flowing variety!"[3]

As the dawn of Romanticism draws nearer Emerson begins to breathe freer air. He recommends Thomson, Young, Cowper, and Gray to his young disciples, and Robert Burns becomes his first eighteenth century enthusiasm. He discovers To a Mouse in November 4, 1831.

> "But fare you weel, auld Nickie-ben! If it

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1. Journal, May 18, 1833
2. Journal, October 11, 1839
3. Journal, August 25, 1839

> be comical, yet it belongs to the moral sublime. .....He tells the mouse that he is his "fellow-mortal.' The whole mouse piece is capital and this is sublime: Still thou art blest compared with me....."

In January 25, 1859, he gave a long remembered speech at the Burns Centenary celebration in Boston. Here we find a picturesque description of those qualities in Burns which were bound to be most attractive to Emerson,- his sympathy with the common life, his love for nature, the simplicity of his diction.

> "He has given voice to all the experiences of common life; he has endeared the farmhouse and cottage, patches and poverty, beans and barley; ale, the poor man's wine; hardship; the fear of debt; the dear society of weans and wife, of brothers and sisters, proud of each other, knowing so few and finding amends for want and obscurity in books and thoughts. What a love of Nature, and, shall I say it? of middle-class Nature. Not like Goethe, in the stars, or like Byron, in the ocean, or Moore, in the luxurious East, but in the homely landscape which the poor see around them,- bleak leagues of pasture and stubble, ice and sleet and rain and snow-choked brooks; birds, hares, field-mice, thistles and heather, which he daily knew.....He had the secret of genius to draw from the bottom of society the strength of its speech, and astonish the ears of the polite with these artless words, better than art, and filtered of all offence through his beauty.....The memory of Burns,- every man's and every boy's and girl's head carries snatches of his songs, and they say them by heart, and, what is strangest of all, never learned them from a book, but from mouth to mouth. The wind whispers them, the birds whistle them, the corn, barley, the bulrushes, hoarsely rustle them, nay, the music-boxes at Geneva are framed and toothed to play them; the hand-organs of the Savoyards in all cities repeat them, and the chimes of bells ring them in the spires. They are the property and the solace of mankind."

Jane Austen

Emerson has long been scored for his harsh judgment of Jane Austen. Let us remember his dislike of the novel

as a type, particularly the novel of manners which she went so long a way toward establishing in English literature, and his lack of appreciation becomes clearer. He never understood the delicacy of her satire. He preferred the "big bow-wow strain" of Walter Scott. The following comment is typical:

> "I am at a loss to understand why people hold Miss Austen's novels at so high a rate, which seem to me vulgar in tone, sterile in artistic invention, imprisoned in the wretched conventions of English society, without genius, wit, or knowledge of the world. Never was life so pinched and narrow. The one problem in the mind of the writer in both the stories I have read, Persuasion and Pride and Prejudice is marriageableness. All that interests in any character introduced is still this one, Has he or she the money to marry with, and conditions conforming? 'Tis the nympholepsy of a fond despair,' say rather of an English boarding-house. Suicide is more respectable."[1]

e. The Nineteenth Century

This more than any other century becomes the field for Emerson's critical study. His greatest men (Shakespeare, Milton) are not here; but it is an age which he can study at first hand and this he does.

(1) The Romantic Poets

Wordsworth

The growth of Emerson's appreciation of Wordsworth is an interesting study . On first acquaintance with his poems Emerson as a critic has little but condemnation for him, but his latest journals record his agreement with a judgment made by an English critic that he is unquestionably the greatest

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1. Journal, August 5, 1861

English poet since Milton.[1] I shall try to select the most significant portions of critical opinion which show the change and development of Emerson's final verdict. In June 30, 1826, Emerson writes a long letter to his Aunt Mary, a part of which he also copied in his journal. It has very largely to do with Wordsworth and the young writer can find little to say in praise of him or any of the English nineteenth century Romanticists:

> ".....Mr. Wordsworth has failed of pleasing by being too much a poet. A man may propose a course of exercises to strengthen his arm with such indiscreet zeal as to paralyze it.....I can't read this poet's mystic and unmeaning verses without feeling that if he had cultivated poetry less, and learning and society more, he would have gained more favour at the hands of the muses, who must be courted, not taken by violence. 'Tis sufficient proof of a man's aberration to know that he is writing verses on a theory; that he has agreed with two or three antics more to bring the public over to a new taste in poetry. It would seem there was some kindred between this new philosophy of poetry and the undisciplined enterprizes of intellect in the middle age. The geniuses of that era, all on fire with that curiosity which is, in every age, inextinguishable, to break the marble silence of Nature and open some intercourse between man and that divinity with which it seems instinct, struggled to grasp the principles of things, to extort from the spheres in the firmament some intimations of the present or some commentary on the past. They were impatient of their straitened dominion over nature, and were eager to explore the secrets of her own laboratory, that they might refine clay and iron into gold, might lengthen life and deduce formulas from the solution of all those mysteries that beseige the human adventurer. Not otherwise this modern poet, by natural humour an ardent lover of all the enchantments of wood and river and seduced by an overweening confidence in the force of his own genius, has discarded that modesty under whose influence all his great precursors have resorted to

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1. Journal, September, 1864

> external nature sparingly for illustration and ornament, and have forborne to tamper with the secret and metaphysical nature of what they borrowed. He has been foolishly inquisitive about the essence and body of what pleased him, of what all sensible men feel to be, in its nature, evanescent. He would pick them to pieces and pounce on the pleasurable element he is sure is in them like the little boy who cut open his drum to see what made the noise. The worthy gentleman gloats over a bulrush, moralizes on the irregularity of one of its fibres, and suspects a connection between an excrescence of the plant and his own immortality. Is it not much more conformable to that golden middle line in which all that is good and wise of life lies, to let what Heaven made small and casual remain the objects of a notice small and casual, and husband our admiration for images of grandeur in matter or in mind? But I should not worry myself with abusing Mr. Wordsworth, not even for his serene egotism, whereby he seems at every turn thunderstruck to see what a prodigious height human genius has headed up in <u>him</u>, but that he has occasionally written lines which I think truly noble. He would be unworthy your notice but that now and then comes from him a flash of divine light and makes you uneasy that he should be such an earthen vessel."

Yet in January, 1828, he copies long passages from Wordsworth's poems into his journal for further study. An entry of the same month, however, finds him still disapproving:

> "A fault that strikes the readers of Mr. Wordsworth's is the direct pragmatical analysis of objects, in their nature <u>poetic</u>, but which all other poets touch incidentally. He mauls the moon and the waters and the bulrushes, as his main business. Milton and Shakespeare touch them gently, as illustration or ornament. Beds of flowers send up a most grateful scent to the passenger who hastens by them, but let him pitch his tent among them and he will find himself grown insensible to their fragrance.....Mr. Wordsworth is a poet with the same error that wasted the genius of the alchemists and astrologers of the middle ages. These attempt to extort by secret means the principle of life, the secret substance of matter from material things; and those to extract intelligence from remoter

> nature, instead of observing that science is ever approximating to truth by dint of application to present wants, and not by search after general and recondite Truth. Mr. Wordsworth is trying to distil the essence of poetry from poetic things, instead of being satisfied to adorn common scenes with such lights from these sources of poetry as nature will always furnish to her true lovers."

He follows Wordsworth's publications just the same, and the poems of 1831-1832 seem to please him better; although he still finds plenty of fault with him.

> "Excellent is the piece called the Happy Warrior.....His noble distinction is that he seeks the truth and shuns with brave self-denial every image and word that is from the purpose, means to stick close to his own thought and give it in naked simplicity and so make it God's affair, not his own whether it shall succeed. But he fails of executing his purpose fifty times for the sorry purpose of making a rhyme in which he has no skill, or from imbecility of mind losing sight of his thought, or from self-surrender to custom in poetic diction."[1]

> "I never read Wordsworth without chagrin; a man of such great powers and ambition, so near to the Dii majores, to fail so meanly in every attempt! A genius that hath epilepsy, a deranged archangel. The Ode to Duty, conceived and expressed in a certain high, severe style, does yet miss of greatness and of all effect by such falsities as
>
> 'And the most ancient heavens through
> thee are fresh and strong'
>
> which is blowing dust in your eyes, because they have no more to do with duty than a dung cart has."[2]

Ten years later he writes,

> "If in this last book of Wordsworth there be dulness, it is yet the dulness of a great and cultivated mind."[3]

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1. Journal, November 18, 1831
2. Journal, December 1, 1832
3. Journal, September 27, 1842

By 1856 he has discovered new values in him.

> "I was to say at the end of my narrative of Wordsworth , that I find nothing in the disparaging speeches of the Londoners about him, that would not easily be said of a faithful scholar who rated things after his own scale, and not by the conventional. He almost alone in his generation has treated the Mind well."[1]

By December 9, 1868, Wordsworth has begun to tower over his contemporaries:

> "Wordsworth is manly, the manliest poet of his age. His poems record the thoughts and emotions which have occupied his mind, and which he reports because of their reality. He has great skill in rendering them into simple and sometimes happiest poetic speech."

And when Emerson comes upon his name in the series of lectures he was giving his Harvard class Wordsworth is given nothing but praise:

> "The capital merit of Wordsworth is that he has done more for the sanity of this generation than any other writer. Early in life.....he made his election between.....chances of wealth and position in the world and the inward promptings of his heavenly genius.....He accepted the call to be a poet."[2]

Coleridge

Coleridge, who is supposed to have contributed so much to Emerson's transcendentalism, is mentioned only casually in the journals. Perhaps he was too well known to require analysis. A passage from English Traits characterizes Emerson's impression of him:

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1. Journal, June 14, 1856
2. Emerson, Natural History of the Intellect, European Books

> "Coleridge, a Catholic mind, with a hunger for ideas; with eyes looking before and after to the highest bards and sages, who wrote and spoke the only high criticism in his time, is one of those who save England from the reproach of no longer possessing the capacity to appreciate what rarest wit the island has yielded.....Even in him the traditional Englishman was too strong for the philosopher, and he fell into accomodations."[1]

Emerson's first trip to Europe was in part a pilgrimage to England where he wished to see Landor, Coleridge, Carlyle, and Wordsworth. "Many things," wrote Emerson in his English Journal, "I owe to the sight of these men."[2]

Byron

Surprisingly enough Emerson found a great deal of worth in Byron's poetry. The pity of the wasted young life seems to him more evident than its wilful sensuality. The bold love of freedom appealed to his own instinct of self-reliance and the rough vigor of the lines won him by their power. He writes to his Aunt Mary on July 26, 1824:

> "Byron - a man of dreadful history, who left no brighter genius behind him than is gone, and no such blasphemer of heaven or pander to sensuality. But the light of sublimer existence was on his cheek, even in his sarcastic beastliness and coarse sneers, nor seemed less than archangel ruined and the excess of glory obscured. It is one of the hardest errors to get rid of,- the admiration of intellectual excellence though depraved, and one cause is, there seems to be no reason why a spirit should be finely touched for such poor issues. One is glad of eternity, when we find so much to learn. But it is melancholy to have your well dry up, your fountain stopped from whence you were wont to look for an unfailing supply. Men marvel at Scott's never-ending

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1. Emerson, English Traits, Literature
2. Journal, September 1, 1833

> traditions, but they set no bounds to their expectation from Byron's creative genius. Wit, argument, history, rhapsody, the extremes of good and ill,- everything was to be expected from his extraordinary invention. He might have added one more wonder to his life - its own redemption. And now he is dead, and is seeing the secrets his paramount genius dared to brave. It is terrible in example to presume as he has done. It is a risque not many are willing to run, but it is less mean and no worse thus to face the things unseen, and shake hands with Lucifer, than to commit the deed, and love the lust, and shake at the contumely of being over-good, and refuse to speak out all the time out of fear of being struck dead."

The statue of the Dying Gladiator in Rome reminds Emerson of his admiration for Byron:

> "The Dying Gladiator is a most expressive statue, but it will always be indebted to the muse of Byron for fixing upon it forever his pathetic thought. Indeed Italy is Byron's debtor, and I think no one knows how fine a poet he is who has not seen the subjects of his verse, and so learned to appreciate the justness of his thought and at the same time their great superiority to other men's."[1]

He does not come up to the high standards which Emerson has set for his poet:

> "Byron is not poet; what did heknow of the world and its law and Lawgiver? What moment had he of that mania which moulds history and man, and tough circumstances,- like wax? He had declamation; he had music, juvenile and superficial music. Even this is very rare, and we delight in it so much that Byron has obtained great fame by this fluency and music. It is delicious. All the 'Hebrew Melodies' are examples.- how neat, how roundly it rolls off the tongue - but what poetry is here? It is the sublime of schoolboy verse. How many volumes of such jingle must we go through before we can be filled, sustained, taught, renewed?...."[2]

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1. Journal, April 20, 1838
2. Journal, March 24, 1846

But January 23, 1850, still finds him lamenting the genius which needed only complementary qualities to make it great:

> "Byron's life suggests that a partnership of authors would have the same immense advantage for literature that concert has in war, in music, and in trade: Byron's, because in his case, as in so many (in mine, for example, who am hardly a writer), his talent is conspicuously partial, and needs a complement. But if one with solid knowledge - a man of massive mind, or a man of ideas, powerful generalizations, or both - had united with Byron, with his unmatched expressiveness, his heat, his firm ductile thread of gold, a battery had been built, against which nothing could stand. But in his isolation Byron is starved for material, has no thoughts; and his fiery affections are only so many women, though rigged out in men's clothes, garnished too with beards and mustachios. They vapor."

Shelley

Emerson never gained any true appreciation of Shelley's poetry; and Shelley devotees have ever since taken revenge by declaring Emerson no critic. Clippings from a few of Emerson's journals will best show just how far, in this case, they were right:

> "Shelley is never a poet. His mind is uniformly imitative; all his poems composite. A fine English scholar he is, with taste, ear, and memory; but imagination, the original authentic fire of the bard, he has not. He is clearly modern, and shares with Wordsworth and Coleridge, Byron, and Hemans the feeling of the Infinite, which labors for expression in their different genius. But all his lines are arbitrary, not necessary, and therefore, though evidently a devout and brave man, I can never read his verses."[1]

> "Elizabeth Hoar says that Shelley is like shining sand; it always looks attractive and valu-

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1. Journal, November 23, 1839

> able, but try never so many times you cannot get anything good. And yet the mica-glitter will still remain after all."[1]

Keats Emerson does not deign to comment on. It is probable that he objected to him on much the same grounds that he found fault with Shelley. Yet, surprisingly, there are quotations from Keats copied into Emerson's journal in November 30, 1839.

(2) Later Poets

Tennyson

Tennyson was another poet about whose worth Emerson took a long time in making up his mind. Sections copied from his journal and placed chronologically show how many times his opinion wavered, but how at the last it came to stand as whole-hearted praise:

> "I think Tennyson got his inspiration in gardens, and that in this country, where there are no gardens, his musky verses could not be written. The Villa d'Este is a memorable poem in my life."[2]

> "Tennyson is a beautiful half of a poet."[3]

> "In Boston I saw the new second volume of Tennyson's poems. It has many merits, but the question might remain whether it has the merit. One would say it was the poetry of an exquisite; that it was prettiness carried out to the infinite, but with no one great heroic stroke; a too vigorous exclusion of all mere natural influences. In reading aloud, you soon become sensible of the monotony of elegance. It wants a little northwest wind, or a northeast storm; it is a lady's bower - garden-spot; or a lord's

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1. Journal, June 16, 1842
2. Journal, July 1, 1838
3. Journal, September 21, 1838

conservatory, aviary, apiary, and musky green-house. And yet, tried by one of my tests, it was found wholly wanting - I mean that it was liberating; it slipped or caused to slide a little 'This mortal coil.' The poem of 'Locksley', and the Talking Oak I bear cheerful witness both gave me to feel a momentary sense of freedom and power."[1]

"Tennyson is a master of meter, but it is as an artist who has learned admirable mechanical secrets. He has no wood-notes. Great are the dangers of education."[2]

"Tennyson's In Memoriam is the commonplaces of condolence among good Unitarians in the first week of mourning. The consumate skill of the versification is the sole merit.....All the merit is appreciable. He is never for a moment too high for his audience. But to demonstrate this mediocrity I was forced to quote those moral sentences which make the fame of true bards."[3]

"When I read Maud then I say Here is one of those English heads again such as in the Elizabethan days were tammed full of delightful fancies. What coloring like Titian, colour like the dawn...."[4]

"Here comes Tennyson's poem (first four of the Idylls of the King) indicating a supreme social culture, a perfect insight, and the possession of all the weapons and all the functions of a man, with the skill to wield them which Homer, Aristophanes, or Dante had. The long promise to pay that runs over Ages from Chaucer, Spenser, Milton, Ben Jonson,- the long promise to write the national poem of Arthur, Tennyson at last keeps, in these low, self-despising times.....The national poem needed a national man. And the blood is still so rich, and healthful, that, at last in Tennyson, a national soul comes to the Olympic games,- equal to the task."[5]

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1. Journal, June 16, 1842
2. Journal, September 26, 1843
3. Journal, January, 1851
4. Journal, February 24, 1855
5. Journal, May 25, 1859

> "Tennyson has abundant invention, but contents himself with just enough; is never obscure or harsh in a new or rare word. Then he has marked virility, as if a surgeon or practical physiologist had no secrets to teach him, but he deals with these as Abraham or Moses would, and without prudery or pruriency. His inventions are adequate to the dignity of the fable. The gift of adequate expression is his.....The fine invention of Tennyson is in crowding into an hour the slow creations and destructions of centuries. It suggests besides, in the coming and vanishing of cities and temples, what really befalls in long durations on earth.....Miracles of cities and temples made by Merlin, like thoughts."[1]

> "The only limit to the praise of Tennyson as a lyric poet is, that he is alive. If he were an ancient, there would be none."[2]

About the other poets of the middle nineteenth century Emerson is strangely silent. In April, 1854, a short sentence in his journal asserts that he has found Browning ingenious. William Morris fares a bit better in June 16, 1868, but stimulates no longer study:

> "In reading these fine poems of Morris, I see but one defect, but that is fatal, namely that the credence of the reader no longer exists. I wrote thus last night, after reading King Acrisius, but this evening I have read The Proud King wherein the fable is excellent, and the story fits this and all times.

(3) Novelists

In the nineteenth century Emerson finds the one novelist who seems to him worthy of the name, Walter Scott.

Scott

"If masterly, unrivalled genius add any

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1. Journal, May 22, 1868
2. Journal, October, 1872

> weight to the invitation for a scholar to step out of his Greek and Hebrew circle of sad enchantment that he may pluck such flowers of taste and fancy as never bloomed before, to deck his strength withal - why then he may read Scott, and particularly the latter novels."[1]
>
> "Din Emlin of Scott, like his Helvellyn, shows how near to a poet he was. All that Birmingham has he had, and what taste and sense! - yet rose into the creative region. As a practitioner or professional poet, he is unrivalled in modern times. In lectures on poetry almost all Scott would have to be produced.
>
> What was said of the Rainers, that they were street-singers, though good of their kind, and that it was a mistake to bring them into concert rooms; - the like is true of Scott."[2]

Yet even Scott lacks life-likeness:

> "Scott is praised for the fidelity with which he painted the demanor and conversation of the superior classes.....His lords brave each other in smart epigrammatic speeches, but the dialogue is in costume and does not please on the second reading; it is not warm with life."[3]

It was the poetic element in Scott, after all, that Emerson loved best as he shows in his Burns Centennial Address August 15, 1871:

> "It is easy to see the origin of his poems. His own ear had been charmed by old ballads crooned by Scottish dames at firesides, and written down from their lips by antiquaries; and finding them now outgrown and dishonoured by the new culture, he attempted to dignify and adapt them to the times in which he lived. Just so much thought, so much picturesque detail in dialogue or description as the old ballad required, so much suppression of details and leaping to the event, he would keep and use, but without any ambition to write a high poem after a classic model.....In the number and variety of his characters he approaches Shakespeare.....Scott

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1. Journal, July, 1822
2. Journal, September, 1845
3. Emerson, Essays, First and Second Series, Manners

portrayed with equal strength and success every figure in his crowded company."

Dickens

Emerson missed the point of much in Dickens' caricature, but at the same time he has caught the Hogarth note in him. He shows no true appreciation of the novelist; yet he is not altogether blind to his virtues.

> "I have read Oliver Twist in obedience to the opinions of so many intelligent people as have praised it. The author has an acute eye for costume; he sees the expression of dress, of form, of gait, of personal deformities; of furniture, of the outside and inside of houses; but his eye rests always on surfaces; he has no insight into character. For want of key to the moral powers the author is fain to strain all his stage trick of grimace, of bodily terror, or murder, and the most approved performances of Remorse. It all avails nothing, there is nothing memorable in the book except the flash, which is got at a police office, and the dancing of the madman which strikes a momentary terror. Like Cooper and Hawthorne he has no dramatic talent. The moment he attempts dialogue the improbability of life hardens to wood and stone. And the book begins and ends without a poetic ray, and so perishes in the reading."[1]

> "Yesterday I read Dickens' American Notes. It answers its end very well, which plainly was to make a readable book, nothing more. Truth is not his object for a single instant, but merely to make good points in lively sequence, and he proceeds very well. As an account of America it is not to be considered for a moment: it is too short, and too narrow, too superficial, and too ignorant, too slight and too fabulous, and the man is totally unequal to the work. .....As a picture of American manners nothing can be falser.....This book makes but a poor apology for its author who certainly appears in no dignified or enviable position."[2]

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1. Journal, September 24, 1839
2. Journal, November 25, 1842

"The next generation will thank Dickens for showing so many mischiefs which parliaments and Christianities had not been strong enough to remove."[1]

"Dickens, with preternatural apprehension of the language of manners and the varieties of street life; with pathos and laughter, with patriotic and still enlarging generosity, writes London tracts. He is a painter of English details, like Hogarth; local and temporary in his tints and style, and local in his aims."[2]

Others

Emerson dismisses Thackeray in a few sentences:

"Thackeray finds that God has made no allowance for the heart in his universe,- more's the pity, he thinks,- but 'tis not for us to be wiser; we must renounce ideals and accept London."[2]

Disraeli amuses but makes no lasting impression on him:

"Miss Fuller read Vivian Gray and made me very merry. Beckendorf is a fine teacher that he who can once conquer his own face can have no farther difficulty. Nothing in the world is to him impossible; as Napoleon who discharged his face of all expression whilst Mme. deStael gazed at him.
Vivian Gray is a bible to a class of young people."[4]

(4) Essayists

Carlyle

Carlyle the man Emerson loved and the spirit of his writing; yet he was not blind to the danger of his friend's eccentric style. One of the first letters which he sends across seas shows this clearly:

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1. Journal, May 1, 1846
2. English Traits, Literature
3. Journal, April 29, 1837

"Evermore thanks for the brave stand you have made for Spiritualism in these writings. But has literature any parallel to the oddity of the vehicle chosen to convey this treasure? I delight in the contents; the for, which my defective apprehension for a joke makes me not appreciate, I leave to your merry discretion. And yet did ever wise and philanthropic author use so defying a diction? As if society were not sufficiently shy of truth without providing it beforehand with an objection to the form. Can it be that this humor proceeds from a despair of finding a contemporary audience, and so the Prophet feels at liberty to utter his message in droll sounds. Did you not tell me, Mr. Thomas Carlyle, sitting upon one of your broad hills, that it was Jesus Christ built Dunscore Kirk yonder? If you love such sequences, then admit, as you will, that no poet is sent into the world before his time; that all the departed thinkers and actors have paved your way; that (at least when you surrender your self) nations and ages do guide your pen, yes, and common goose-quills as well as your diamond graver. Believe then that harp and ear are formed by one revolution of the wheel; that men are waiting to hear your epical song; and so be pleased to skip those excursive involved glees, and give us the simple air, without the volley of variations. At least in some of your prefaces you should give us the theory of your rhetoric. I comprehend not why you should lavish in that spendthrift style of yours celestial truths.....You are dispensing with that which is rarest, namely, the simplest truths,- truths which lie next to consciousness, and which only the Platos and Goethes perceive."[1]

Emerson's journal entry in December 7, 1835, still ponders the question of Carlyle's talent.

"Carlyle's talent, I think lies more in his beautiful criticism, in seizing the idea of the man or the time, than in original speculation. He seems to me most limited in this chapter or speculation in which they regard him as most original and profound - I mean his Religion and immortality from the removal of Time and Space.

He seems merely to work with a foreign thought, not to live in it himself."

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1. Carlyle-Emerson Correspondence, May 14, 1834

His letter to Carlyle, after he has perused the French Revolution in manuscript, is warm with praise for the author's very evident power, but pleads once more for greater simplicity of style.

> "I think you are a very good giant; disporting yourself with an original and vast ambition of fun; pleasure and peace not being strong enough for you, you choose to suck pain also and teach fever and famine to dance and sing. I think you have written a wonderful book, which will last a long time. I see that you have created a history which the world will own to be such.....I insist, of course, that it might be more simple, less Gothically efflorescent. You will say no rules for the illumination of windows can apply to the Aurora borealis. However, I find refreshment when every now and then a special fact slips into the narrative couched in sharp and business-like terms. This character-drawing in the book is certainly admirable; the lines are ploughed furrows; but there was cake and ale before, though thou be virtuous."[1]

On his second reading of the book he records in his journal a similar mood of half-whimsical despair:

> "I have read with astonishment and unbated curiosity and pleasure Carlyle's Revolution again, half through the second volume. I cannot help feeling that he squanders his genius. Why should an imagination such as never rejoiced before the face of God, since Shakespeare, be content to play? Why should he trifle and joke? I cannot see, I cannot praise. It seems to me he should have writ in such deep earnest that he should have trembled to his fingers' ends with the terror and the beauty of his visions. It is not true that, with all his majestic toleration, his infinite superiority as a man to the flocks of clean and unclean creatures he describes,- that yet he takes a point of view somewhat higher than his insight or any human insight can profitably use and maintain; that there is, therefore, some inequality between his power of painting,- which is matchless, and his power of explaining."[2]

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1. Carlyle-Emerson Correspondence, September 13, 1837
2. Journal, March 4, 1838

Yet no man was more sensitively optimistic and appreciative of Carlyle's real force. Many a time Emerson gives way to unstinted admiration, such as in this journal entry of August 9, 1837:

> "This man upholds and propels civilization. For every wooden post he knocks away he replaces one of stone. He cleanses and exalts men and leaves the world better. He knows and loves the heavenly stars, and sees fields below with trees and animals. He sees towered cities, royal houses, and poor men's chambers, and reports the good he sees, God through him telling this generation also that he has beholden his work and sees that it is good. He discharges his duty as one of the world's Scholars."

He gets at the heart of Carlyle's paper on Mirabeau which he predicts will establish his friend's kingdom:

> "How he gropes with giant fingers into the dark of man, into the obscure recesses of power in human will, and we are encouraged by his word to feel the might that is in a man.....I think he has seen as no other in our time so inexhaustible a mine is the language of Conversation. He does not use the written dialect of the time.....but draws strength and other-wit out of a poetic use of the spoken vocabulary, so that his paragraphs are all a sort of splendid conversation."[1]

And the pleasure he finds in reading Carlyle's History of Frederick the Great comes in for its share of loving analysis:

> "The History of Frederick the Great is infinitely the wittiest book ever written, a book that one would think the English people would rise up in a mass and thank him for by cordial acclamation, and congratulate themselves that such a head existed among them and sympathizing and much-reading America would make a new treaty extraordinary of joyful grateful delight with England, in acknowledgment of such a donation,- a book with so many memorable and heroic facts, working directly, too, to practise,- with new heroes,- things unvoiced before,- with a range of thought and wisdom, the largest and the most colloquially elastic, that ever

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1. Journal, March 29, 1837

> was, not so much applying as inosculating to every need and sensibility of a man, so that I do not so much read a stereotype page as I see the eyes of the writer looking into my eyes; all the way, chuckling with undertones and puns and winks and shrugs and long commanding glances, and stereoscoping every figure that passes.....for its moral verdict on men and nations and manners of modern times."[1]

And still, sorrowfully, Emerson cannot accord a place among the great to his friend.

> "Yes, Carlyle represents very well the literary man, makes good the place of and function of Erasmus and Johnson, of Dryden and Swift, to our generation. He is thoroughly a gentleman and deserves well of the whole fraternity of scholars for sustaining the dignity of his profession of Author in England. Yet I always feel his limitation, and praise him as one who plays his part well according to his light, as I praise the Clays and Websters. For Carlyle is worldly, and speaks not out of the celestial region of Milton and Angels."[2]

> "Carlyle is a better painter in the Dutch style than we have had in literature before. It is terrible - his closeness and fidelity: he copies that which never was seen before. It is like seeing your figure in a glass. It is an improvement in writing as strange as Daguerre' in picture, and rightly fell in the same age with that; and yet there is withal an entire reserve on his own part and the hiding of his hand. What do we know of his own life? The courage which is grand, the courage to feel that Nature who made me may be trusted, and one's self painted as also a piece of Nature, he has not."[3]

Landor

Walter Savage Landor was another English writer whose Imaginary Conversations had reached Emerson's interest and sent him to seek out the author on his European voyage. He

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1. Journal, May, 1859
2. Journal, July 12, 1842
3. Journal, August 11, 1851

thinks that Landor has not learned the wisdom of yielding himself wholly to his genius, but praises his fidelity in character drawing.

> "Landor has too much wilfulness: he will not let his genius speak, but must make it all himself. A writer must have l'abandon, he must be content to stand aside and let truth and beauty speak for him, or he cannot expect to be heard far."[1]

> "Landor has the merit of knowing the meaning of character. I know no modern writer who gives traits of character with more distinct knowledge than he. He has also the merit of not explaining. He writes for the immortals only."[2]

Pericles and Aspasia commends itself to Emerson's attention, but he misses the moral element in its gaudy pages:

> "In Landor's noble book, Pericles and Aspasia, is honor and elegance enough to polish a nation for an age. All the elements of the gentlemen are there, except holiness. Religion in a high degree he does not know. What is the substance of elegance but the will to serve all? How does a benevolent person who has helped, helps, and will help men, sitting by your side, rise out of all consideration, of fashion of the times, of costume, of birth, decorated only by his primary nobility!"[3]

> "Landor's Pericles and Aspasia has little religion, but speaks to your taste, your honor, and your wit; then it charms me that he never stoops to explanation, nor uses seven words where one will do."[4]

His impressions of Landor are summarized in his lecture on Europe and European Books:

> "Mr. Landor is one of the foremost of that small class who make good in the nineteenth century the claims of pure literature. In these busy days of avarice and ambition, when there is so little disposition to profound thought or to any but the

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1. Journal, May 28, 1836
2. Journal, August 22, 1838

most superficial intellectual entertainments, a faithful scholar.....a friend and consoler of mankind.. ....Yet it is not as an artist that Mr. Landor commends himself to us. He is not epic or dramatic, he has not the high, overpowering method by which the master gives unity and integrity to a work of many parts. He is too wilful, and never abandons himself to his genius. His books are a strange mixture of politics, etymology, allegory, sentiment, and personal history; and what skill of transition he may possess is superficial, not spiritual. His merit must rest at last, not on the spirit of the dialogue or the symmetry of any of his sentences. Many of these will secure their own immortality in English Literature; and this, rightly considered, is no mean merit. These are not plants and animals, but the genetical atoms of which both are composed.....Of many of Mr. Landor's sentences we are fain to remember what was said of those of Socrates; that they are cubes, which will stand firm, place them how or where you will."[1]

Macaulay

Macaulay's History of England interests Emerson by sheer facility of execution.

"The story (the history of England) is told with all that ability which one meets so abundantly in England, and in no other country,- full of knowledge of books, and men, and customs, which it is creditable to know. The story is quite full of bon-ton. It is written with extreme diligence and is very entertaining and valuable from the amount of good information and curious anecdote, and really has claims to be a history of the people of England, as the author has studied to make it.....The writer has a great deal of talent, but no elevation of mind. There is not a novel or striking thought in the book, not a new point of view from which to consider the events, and never one thrill or pulse of moral energy imparted. He is always a fine, artificial Englishman, and keeping the highway invariably; well-bred, but for sale (all dated Windsor Castle). Here is a good black blood, English pluck, but no philosophy;- a deal of pamphlets now well bound."[2]

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1. Natural History of the Intellect
2. Journal, July 1, 1849

"Macaulay's history is full of low merits; it is like English manufactures of all kinds, neat, convenient, portable, saleable, made on purpose for the Harpers to print a hundred copies of....No memorable line has he written, no sentence. He is remembered by flippancy on one occasion against Plato and Bacon, but has no affirmative talent: he can write quantities of verses, too, to order; wrote "Lays" or something. No doubt wrote good nonsense verses at Eton, better than Virgil."[1]

Arnold

Emerson speaks of reading two of Arnold's books with pleasure in one of his letters to Carlyle and a journal entry of October 31, 1867 shows his appreciation of Arnold's criticism.

"Matthew Arnold has the true critical perception and feeling of style, and has shown more insight on that subject than any contemporary. See his Celts and his Homer."

In General

Emerson looks out on the English literature of his own day and feels that taken as a whole the nineteenth century is a stagnant period. He believes, as in America, this is due to an influx of materialism:

"What is called the Revival of Letters or the letting-in of the Hebrew and of the Greek mind on the Gothic brain, wrought a miracle, and produced the English inspiration, which culminated in Shakespeare. For two centuries England was philosophic, religious, poetic; as that influence declined, it cooled common sense into materialism again, and lost the fine power of transition, of imagination, and unity; lost profoundness and connection. And a mind with this endowment, like Coleridge, Wordsworth, Swedenborg, is not only ungenial, but unintelligible.....The English mind is now supersti-

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1. Journal, September 7, 1849

tious before facts; they make a great ado about the truth. The oldest mustiest formularies we expect from them, and find; no deep apercu, no all-binding theory, no glimpse of distant relations, and the quoddam vinculum. There is poor-smell, and learned trifling, and Locke instead of Berkeley."[1]

English poetry is little better than American. It lacks great design and moral fervor.

"Where is great design in modern English poetry? The English have lost sight of the fact that poetry exists to speak the spiritual law, and that no wealth of description or of fancy is yet essentially new and out of the limits of prose, until this condition is reached."[2]

"Bardic sentences how few! Literature warps away from life, though at first it seems to bind it. If now I should count the English Poets who have contributed aught to the Bible of existing England and America sentences of guidance and consolation which are still glowing and effective - how few! Milton, Shakespeare, Pope, Burns, Young, Cowper, Wordsworth, and Herbert, Jonson, Donne."[3]

"The English nation is full of manly, clever men, well-bred, who write these pungent off-hand paragraphs in the literary and poetical journals. .....It is a coup de force. All this is convenient and civilized: but I had rather take very uncultured, inornate, irregular, very bad poetry with the chance of now and then an urgent, fiery line like threads of gold in a mass of ore. We have in America the comfort of the wretched, that out of this zone, England is as indigent as America in great writers."[4]

3. German Literature

Emerson knew German literature almost wholly through the Transcendentalist philosophers to whom Coleridge had intro-

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1. Journal, September 8, 1853
2. English Traits, Literature
3. Journal, March 24, 1846
4. Journal, March, 1845

duced him and Goethe for whom Carlyle kindled his admiration. It is through his comments upon Goethe almost alone that we can trace Emerson's criticism of the books of this country.

a. Goethe

Emerson's critical opinion of Goethe may best be studied in his journals and the essay in Representative Men called Goethe, or, the Writer. The earliest journal entry, made after he had returned from Europe and settled down at Carlyle's suggestion to read all Goethe in the original, is the longest:

> "What a charm does Wilhelm Meister spread over society, which we were just getting to think odious. And yet, as I read the book today and thought of Goethe as the Tag und Jahres Hefte describes him, he seemed to me,- all-sided, gifted, indefatigable student as he is,- to be only another poor monad, after the fashion of his little race bestirring himself immensely to hide his nothingness, spinning his surface directly before the eye to conceal the universe of his ignorance. The finest poems of the world have been expedients to get bread, or else expedients to keep the writer from the madhouse and amuse him and his fellow men with the illusion he knew; but the greatest passages they have writ, the infinite conclusions to which they owe their fame, are only confessions. Throughout Goethe prevails the undersong of confession and amazement; the apothegm of Socrates; the recantation of Man. The first questions are always to be asked, and we fend them off by much speaking and many books, so that scarcely can I blame the man who affects to philosophize as some sensualists do, and says his fun is profound calculation. And yet it is best in the poorest view to keep the powers healthy and supple by appropriate action.....
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> The Tag and Jahres Hefte is a book unparalled in America, an account of all events, persons, studies, taken from one point of view. The problem to be solved is How shall this soul called Goethe be educated? And whatever he does or whatever befalls him is viewed solely in relation to its effect upon the development of his mind. Even in the arms of his mistress at Rome he says he studied sculpture and poetry. To husband our admiration is an intellectual temperance indispensable to health.

> But Goethe was a person who hated words that did not stand for things, and had a sympathy with everything that existed, and therefore never writes without saying something. He will be artist, and look at God and man, and the Future and the infinite, as a self-possessed spectator who believed that what he saw he could delineate. Herder wisely questioned whether a man had a right thus to affect the god, instead of working with all his heart in his place. Self-cultivation is yet the moral of all that Goethe has writ, and in indolence, intolerance and perversion I think we can spare an olive and a laurel for him. No man has drawn his materials of fiction from so wide a circuit. Very properly he introduces into the machinery of his romance whatever feeling or impulse the most rapt enthusiast has trusted in. Coincidences, dreams, omens, spiritual impressions, and a habitual religious faith - all these are the materials which as a wise artist, he avails himself of.
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> Nevertheless there is a difference between thought and thought, and it is as real a defect in a man not to perceive the right of his moral sentiments to his allegiance, as it is not to be conscious of moral sentiments. Yet Goethe, with all his fine things about Entsagen can write and print too like Rochester and Beranger."[1]

Emerson's comment on Faust is discriminating.

> "In Goethe is that sincerity which makes the value of literature and is that one voice or one writer who wrote all the good books. In Helena, Faust is sincere and represents actual, cultivated strong natured Man; the book would be farrago without the sincerity of Faust. I think the second part of Faust the grandest enterprise of literature that has been attempted since the Paradise Lost. It is a philosophy of history set in Poetry."[2]

Goethe's depth of resource claims his wonder:

> "Goethe with his extraordinary breadth of experience and culture, the security with which like a great continental gentleman, he looks impartially over all literatures of the mountains, the provinces and the sea, and avails himself of the best of all, contrasts with the rigor of the

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1. Journal, June 20, 1834
2. Journal, September 26, 1843

> English, and superciliousness and flippancy of the French. His perfect taste, the austere felicities of his style. It is delightful to find our own thought in so great a man."[1]
>
> "There sits he at the centre of all visibles and knowables, blowing bubble after bubble, so transparent, so round, so coloured that he thinks, and you think that they are pretty good miniatures of the All. Such attempts are all his minor poems, proverbs, Xenien, parables. Have you read the Weltseele? The danger of such attempts as this striving to write universal poetry is, that nothing is so shabby as to fail. You may write an ill romance or a play, and t'is no great matter. Better men have done so. But when what should be greatest truths flat out into shallow truisms, then are we all sick.
>
> But much I fear that Time, the serene judge, will not be able to make out so good a verdict for Goethe as did and doth Carlyle. I am afraid that under his faith is no-faith, that under his love is love-of-ease. However, his muse is catholic as any ever was."[2]

Emerson finds lacking in Goethe the moral force which is to him a <u>sine qua non</u> of a great writer - and with all his sincere admiration for the German writer's genius he denies him his highest praise.

> "Hundred-handed, Argus-eyed, able and happy to cope with this rolling miscellany of facts and sciences, and, by his own versatility, to dispose of them with ease; a manly mind, unembarrassed by the variety of coats of convention with which life had got incursted, easily able by his subtlety to pierce these, and to draw his strength from nature, with which he lived in full communion.....There is a heart-cheering freedom in his speculation. The immense horizon which journeys with us lends its majesty to trifles, and to matters of convenience and necessity, as to solemn and festal performances. He was the soul of his century.....He has clothed our modern existence with poetry. Amid littleness and detail he detected the Genius of life.....and

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1. Journal, May 8, 1844
2. Journal, March 21, 1836

showed that the dulness and prose we ascribe to the age was only another mask.....Wilhelm Meister is a novel in every sense, the first of its kind, called by its admirers, the only delineation of modern society.....I suppose no book of the century can compare with it in its delicious sweetness, so new, so provoking to the mind, gratifying it with so many and so solid thoughts, just insights into life and manners and characters. .....Yet, I dare not say that Goethe ascended to the highest grounds from which genius has spoken. He has not worshipped the highest unity; he is incapable of a self-surrender to the moral sentiment."[1]

b. The Philosophers of the Romantic Era

Emerson writes in his journal on March 24, 1846:

"In Germany there still seems some hidden dreamer from whom this strange, genial, poetic comprehensive philosophy comes, and from which the English and French get mere rumors and fragments, which are yet the best philosophy we know. One while we thought that this fontal German was Schelling; then Fichte, Novalis; then Oken; then it hovered about Schleiermacher, and settled for a time on Hegel. But on producing authenticated books from each of these masters, we find them clever men, but nothing like so great and deep a poet sage as we had looked for. And now we are still to seek for the lurking Behmen of modern Germany. Hegel's philosophy, blazoned by Cousin, that an idea always conquers, and, in all history, victory has ever fallen on the right side (a doctrine which Carlyle has, as usual, found a fine idiom for, that Right and Might go together) was a specimen of this Teutonism - something of it there is in Schelling; more in his quoted Maader; something in Goethe, who is catholic and poetic. Swedenborg had much; Novalis had good sentences; Kant, nothing of it. Kepler was 'An Unitarian of the united world.'"

The influence of this philosophy has spread out into the literature of the period.

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1. Representative Men, Goethe

"The professors of Germany, a secluded race, free to think, but not invited to action, poor and crowded, went back into the recesses of consciousness with Kant.....

A portion of their poets and writers are introversive to a fault, and pick every rose to pieces - Tieck and Richter. Wieland writes of real man, and Herder, and above all, Goethe. He is the high priest of the age. He is the truest of all writers. His books are all records of what has been lived, and his sentences and words seem to see. What is good that is said or written now lies nearer to men's business and bosoms than of old. What is good goes now to all. What was good a century ago is written under the manifest belief that it was as safe from the eye of the common people as the Tartars. The Universal Man is now as real as existence as the Devil was then."[1]

Emerson does not find great literature in Germany; it lacks too often the common touch. After the death of Goethe his interest fails.

"On the whole what have these German Weimarish art friends done? They have rejected all the traditions and conventions, have sought thereby one step nearer the absolute truth. But still they are not nearer than others. I do not draw from them great influences. The heroic, the holy, I lack. They are contemptuous. They fail in sympathy with humanity. The voice of nature they bring me to hear is not divine, but ghastly, hard and ironical. They do not illuminate me; they do not edify me. Plutarch's heroes cheer, exalt..... The roots of what is great and high must still be in the common life."[2]

"As for Germany we have no interest in it since the death of Goethe. All kinds of power usually develop themselves at the same time, and I look in the most active race for idealism....."[3]

His correspondence with Grimm came some years later and lasted until almost the end of his life. He praised Grimm's Life of

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1. Journal, September 23, 1836
2. Journal, April 26, 1837
3. Journal, November 17, 1849

Michelangelo warmly; yet one feels in reading over the letters which passed between America and Germany that Grimm's was the greater interest in the friendship.

4. French Literature

Emerson caught cleverly the differences between the types of literature which grew up in England, Germany, and France as he shows in his essay on Goethe.

> "In England and America there is a respect for talent.....In France there is even a greater delight in intellectual brilliancy, for its own sake.....The German intellect wants the French sprightliness, the fine practical understanding of the English, and the American adventure; but it has a certain probity, which never rests in a superficial performance, but asks steadily, To what end?"[1]

Montaigne was his hero in French literature as Goethe had been in German.

a. Montaigne

Montaigne is a favorite of Emerson's from his college days. The young student delighted in the force of the French writer's epigramatic style. Probably more than any other single man, Montaigne influenced the style of Emerson's essays. On August 3, 1835, Emerson writes in his journal.

> "Yesterday I delighted myself with Michel de Montaigne. With all my heart I embrace the grand old sloven. He pricks and stings the sense of virtue in me - the wild Gentile stock, I mean, for he has no Grace. But his panegyric of Cato, and of Socrates in his essay of Cruelty (volume ii) do wind up again for us the spent

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1. Representative Men, Goethe

> springs and make virtue possible without the discipline of Christianity, or rather do shame her of her eye-service and put her upon her honor. I read the Essays in Defence of Seneca and Plutarch; on Books; on Drunkenness; and on Cruelty. And at some fortunate line which I cannot now recall, the spirit of some Plutarch hero or sage touched mine with such thrill as the war-trump makes in Talbot's ear and blood."

The low-style of Montaigne may well have excited his own first interest in it. Although he finds the highest moral elements lacking- as who does not- he loves him to the very last days of his life for his nerve and sinew and utter honesty.

> "Montaigne is the frankest and honestest of all writers. His French freedom runs into grossness but he has anticipated all censure by the bounty of his own confessions. In his times, books were written to one sex only, and almost all were written in Latin; so that, in a humorist, a certain nakedness of statement was permitted, which our manners, of a literature addressed equally to both sexes, do not allow. But, though a biblical plainness, coupled with a most uncanonical levity, may shut his pages to many sensitive readers, yet the offence is superficial. He parades it: he makes the most of it: nobody can think or say any worse of him than he does..... Here is impatience and fastidiousness at color or pretense of any kind. He has been in courts so long as to have conceived a furious disgust at appearances; he will indulge himself with a little cursing and swearing; he will talk with sailors and gypsies, use flash and street ballads: he has stayed in-doors till he is deadly sick, he will to the open air, though it rain bullets....What ever you get here shall smack of the earth and of real life, sweet, or smart, or stinging.....
>
> As I look at his effigy opposite the title-page, I seem to hear him say, 'You may play old Poz, if you will; you may rail and exaggerate,- I stand here for truth, and will not, for all the states, and churches, and revenues, and personal reputations of Europe, over state the dry fact, as I see it; I will rather mumble and prose about what I certainly know,- my house and barns; my father, my wife, and my tenants.....and a hundred straws just as ridiculous,- then I will write, with a fine crow-quill a fine romance.'.....The essays, therefore, are an enter-

taining soliloquy on every random topic that comes into his head; treating everything without ceremony, yet with masculine sense.....He is never dull, never insincere, and has the genius to make the reader care for all that he cares for."[1]

b. Other Authors

Emerson desires that Rabelais should be read for the proverbs and anecdotes he contains.

"Rabelais is not to be skipped in literary history, as he is the source of so much proverb, story, and joke which are derived from him into all modern books in all languages."[2]

The French novel he thinks very poorly of, as we should expect. Some of his comments on it are amusing:

"A little too much in the French novel about this superbe chevelure. The less said of that meteor the better. It is of quite unspeakable character, seat of illusion, and comes as near to witchcraft and humbugging as anything in Nature."[3]

"Balzac has two merits, talent and Paris."[4]

"George Sand is a great genius and yet owes to her birth in France, her entire freedom from the cant and snuffle of our dead Christianity."[5]

Madame de Stael he seems never to have quite made up his mind about:

"I have read Corinne with as much emotion as a book can excite in me. A true representation of the tragedy of woman, which yet (thanks to the mysterious compensation which nature provided) they rarely feel. The tragedy of genius also. The story labours with the fault of an extravagant, I may say ridiculous, filial passion in Oswald,

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1. Representative Men, Montaigne, The Skeptic
2. Journal, October, 1842
3. Journal, September, 1848
4. Journal, August, 1842
5. Journal, September 10, 1848

> which no man of such intelligence can carry so far, and then with the second impossibility of his rapid marriage. No matter; though the circumstances are untrue, the position and the feelings of Corinne are possible, and as Plato would say, more true than history."[1]

5. Italian Literature

In Italian literature Emerson's attention is chiefly confined to Dante, although from his comments it would seem that he never came to any deep understanding of him. He was frequently so fascinated by his style that he seemed to miss the real significance of the content.

a. Dante

The first journal comment shows his enthusiasm - one which lasted throughout his lifetime,- although at a distance.

> "Dante's Vita Nuova reads like the Book of Genesis, as if written before literature, whilst truth yet existed. A few incidents are sufficient, and are displayed with Oriental amplitude and leisure. It is the Bible of Love."[2]

But a later comment shows how much, after all, he missed:

> "But Dante still appears to me, as ever, an exceptional mind, a prodigy of imaginative function, executive rather than contemplative or wise. Undeniable force of a peculiar kind, a prodigy, but not like Shakespeare, or Socrates, or Goethe, a beneficent humanity. His fames and infamies are so capriciously distributed,- what odd reasons for putting men in his inferno! The somnambulic genius of Dante is dream strengthened to the tenth power,- dream so fierce that it grasps all the details of the phantom spectacle, and, in spite of itself, clothes and conveys them into the waking memory, and can recite what every

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1. Journal, February 3, 1834
2. Journal, June 22, 1843

other would forget. What pitiless minuteness of horrible details! He is a curiosity like the mastodon, but one would not desire such for friends and contemporaries, abnormal throughout like Swedenborg. But at a frightful cost these obtain their fame. Dante a man to put in a museum, but not in your house. Indeed I never read him nor regret that I do not."[1]

b. Boccaccio

Surprisingly enough, although Emerson enjoyed Rabelais, Montaigne, and Chaucer, Boccaccio held little worth for him:

"There is no greater lie than a voluptuous book like Boccaccio. For it represents the pleasures of appetite, which only at rare intervals, a few times in a life-time are intense, and to whose acme continence is essential, as frequent, habitual, and belonging to the incontinent."[2]

c. Manzoni

Still more surprising, the novel-hater finds some real talent in Manzoni.

"I have finished the I Promessi Sposi, and I rejoice that a man exists in Italy who can write such a book. I hear from day to day such hideous anecdotes of the depravity of manners, that it is an unexpected delight to meet this elevated and eloquent moralist. Renzo, and Lucia, Fra Cristoforo and Federigo Borromeo,- all are excellent and which is the highest praise. All excite the reader to virtue."[3]

6. Old Literatures

a. Greek

Emerson learned his love of Greek literature from his

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1. Journal, May 1, 1867
2. Journal, March 23, 1835
3. Journal, May 21, 1833

Aunt Mary, Mrs. Ripley, and Edward Everett. His debt to Plato I have mentioned earlier. His chief interest is here, but his appreciation goes beyond to mythology, epic, and tragedy. He knew Homer and loved to quote Greek myths as illustrative anecdotes in his lectures.

> "We like the strong objectiveness of Homer and of the primitive poems of each country,....but that cannot be preserved in a large and civilized population."[1]

> "You praise Homer and disesteem the art that makes tragedy. To me it seems higher - the unpopular and austere muse that casts human life into a high tragedy, Prometheus, Oedipus, Hamlet (midway between the Epic and the Ode) - than the art of the epic poet, which condescends more to common humanity, and approaches the ballad, Man is nine parts fool for one part wise, and therefore Homer and Chaucer more read than Antigone, Hamlet, or Comus.....
>
> This feeling I have respecting Homer and Greek, that in this great, empty continent of ours, stretching enormous almost from pole to pole, with thousands of long rivers and thousands of ranges of mountains, the rare scholar, who, under a farmhouse, reads Homer and the Tragedies, adorns the land. He begins to fill it with wit, to counterbalance the enormous disproportion of the unquickened earth. He who first reads Homer in America is its Cadmus and Numa, and a subtle but unlimited benefactor."[2]

> "The beautiful fables of the Greeks, being proper creatures of the imagination and not of the fancy, are universal verities. What a range of meanings and what perpetual pertinence has the story of Prometheus! Beside its primary value as the first chapter of the history of Europe.....it gives the history of religion with some closeness to the faith of later ages."[3]

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1. Journal, August 25, 1843
2. Journal, October 12, 1842
3. Essays, First and Second Series, History

"I think it wonderful, the beauty of the Greeks as contrasted with the unbeautiful English nursery-stories, which, though now and then rarely admitting in their fable a natural fact, as of frost, or effects of spring, to gleam through, yet in the main are childish and insignificant, like Blue Beard or Jack the Giant Killer whilst every word of the Greek is at once beautiful and also science."[1]

Xenophon and the Greek tragedies were favorite books of his:

"I read the Anabasis in English today with great pleasure. Xenophon draws characters like Clarendon. His speeches are excellent: none better than that upon horses, and that where, having seen the Sea, he draws up against the opposing barbarians and tells them 'that these being all the obstacle that is left, they ought to eat these few alive.' He is an ancient hero; he splits wood, he defends himself by his tongue against every man in his army, as by his sword against the enemy."[2]

"When yesterday I read Antigone, at some words a very different image of female loveliness rose out of the clouds of the past and the actual. That poem is just what Winckelmann described the Greek beauty to be,- 'the tongue on the balance of expression.' It is remarkable for nothing so much as the extreme temperance, the abstemiousness which never offends by the superfluous word or degree too much of emotion. How slender the materials, how few the incidents! How just the symmetry! Charles thinks it as great a work of genius as any. Every word writ in steel. But that other image which it awakened for me brought with it the perception how entirely each rational creature is dowried with all the gifts of God. The universe - nothing less - is totally given to each new being..."[3]

"The costly charm of the ancient tragedy, and indeed of all old literature, is, that the persons speak simply,- speak as persons who have great

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1. Journal, September 8, 1853
2. Journal, November 10, 1836
3. Journal, November 14, 1835

good sense without knowing it, before yet the reflective habit had become the predominant habit of mind. Our admiration of the old is not admiration of the old but of the natural. The Greeks are not reflective, but perfect in their senses and in their health.....Adults acted with the simplicity and grace of children.....They combine the energy of manhood with the engaging unconsciousness of childhood."[1]

Plato

But Plato alone is worthy of all praise.

"Among books, Plato only is entitled to Omar's fanatical compliment to the Koran, when he said, 'Burn the libraries; for, their value is in this book.'....Out of Plato come all things that are still written and debated among men of thought..... Plato is philosophy, and philosophy, Plato,- at once the glory and shame of mankind, since neither Saxon nor Roman have availed to add any idea to his categories.....How many great men Nature is incessantly sending up out of night, to be his men,- Platonists! the Alexandrians, a constellation of genius; the Elizabethans, not less;..... Calvinism is in his Phaedo; Christianity is in it. Mahometanism draws all its philosophy, in its handbook of morals, the Akhlaky-Jalaly, from him. Mysticism finds in Plato all its texts. This citizen of a town in Greece is no villager nor patriot. An Englishman reads and says 'how English!' a German, - 'How Teutonic!' and Italian,- 'How Roman and Greek!'....So Plato seems to a reader in New England, an American genius. His broad humanity transcends all sectional lines.....

Plato, in his plenty, is never restricted, but has the fit word. There is, indeed, no weapon in all the armory of wit which he did not possess and use,- epic, analysis, mania, intuition, music, satire, and irony, down to the customary and polite. His illustrations are poetry, and his jests illustrations."[2]

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1. Essays, First and Second Series, History
2. Representative Men, Plato

b. Latin

Emerson was well read in the Roman historians and knew his Virgil as we can see by his frequent quotation from it, but Plutarch was the writer which he singled out from this literature to analyze and to recommend.

> "Plutarch, the elixir of Greece and Rome, that is the book which nations went to compose. If the world's library were burning, I should as soon fly to rescue that, as Shakespeare and Plato, or next afterwards."[1]

> "If we explore the literature of Heroism we shall quickly come to Plutarch, who is its doctor and historian.....Each of his Lives is a refutation to the despondency and cowardice of our religious and political theorists. A wild courage, a Stoicism not of the schools, but of the blood, shines in every anecdote, and has given that book its immense fame. We need books of this tart cathartic virtue, more than books of political science, or of private economy. Life is a festival only to the wise."[2]

> "Go with mean people and you think life is mean. Then read Plutarch, and the world is a proud place, peopled with men of positive quality, with heroes and demigods standing around us, who will not let us sleep."[3]

c. The Bible

I have spoken of Emerson's interest in the Bibles of all nations. In many ways they are to him the greatest of all literature. He calls them, collectively, The Bible.

> "The most original book in the world is the Bible. This old collection of the ejaculations of love and dread, of the supreme desires and contritions of men, proceeding out of the region of the grand and eternal, by whatsoever different mouths

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1. Journal, May, 1860
2. Essays, First and Second Series, Heroism
3. Society and Solitude, Books

spoken, and through a wide extent of times and countries, seems the alphabet of the nations, and all posterior literature, either the chronicle of facts under very inferior Ideas, or, when it rises to sentiment, the combinations, analogies or degradations of this.

It is in the nature of things that the highest originality must be moral. The only person who can be entirely independent of this fountain of literature and equal to it, must be a prophet in his own proper person. Shakespeare, the first literary genius of the world, leans on the Bible: his poetry supposes it. If we examine this brilliant influence, Shakespeare, as it lies in our minds, we shall find it reverent, deeply indebted to the traditional morality,- in short, compared with the tone of the prophets, Secondary. On the other hand, the Prophets do not imply the existence of Shakespeare or Homer,- advert to no books or arts,- only to dread ideas and emotions. People imagine that the place which the Bible holds in the world, it owes to miracles. It owes it simply to the fact that it came out of a profounder depth of thought than any other book, and the effect must be precisely proportionate. Gibbon fancied combinations of circumstances that gave Christianity its place in history. But in nature it takes an ounce to balance an ounce.

I have used in the above remarks the Bible for the Ethical Revelation considered generally, including, that is, the Vedas, the Sacred writings of every nation and not of the Hebrews alone; although these last, for the very reason I have given, precede all similar writings so far as to be commonly called The Book, or Bible alone."[1]

7. Comparative Literature

It is interesting at this point to note that Carpenter believes Emerson through his interest in Oriental literature which I have discussed under the section dealing with the Influence of the East, founded the modern school of Comparative Religion in America and gave impetus to the study of Comparative

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1. Journal, November 17, 1839

Literature. He calls Emerson, Whitman, and Thoreau stimulators of the American interest in Orientalism.[1] Emerson made translations from German versions of the Persian poets and wrote an appreciative foreword to an anthology published during his life time by William Rounsville Alger, The Poetry of the East. Mrs. A. C. L. Bottu, a disciple of Emerson's, wrote, after his death, one of the first American handbooks of Universal Literature.[2] Recently Mark Van Doren's Anthology of World Poetry and Eunice Tietjens Poetry of the Orient have both included some of Emerson's translations of oriental poetry.

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1. Carpenter, Emerson and Asia, p. 250
2. Ibid., pp. 247-249

PART III

An Estimate of Emerson as a Critic and His Place in Criticism

An Estimate of Emerson as a Critic and His Place in Criticism

I have already said that I think Emerson rarely was conscious of himself as a critic. With the possible exception of Plato and Goethe, few of his favorite authors wrote literary criticism to any extent, and although his reading lists include Dryden, Samuel Johnson, Burke, Lamb, Arnold, and St. Beuve, he copies few quotations of a literary critical nature into his journal and made little use of them in his lectures. This, together with his natural distaste for elaborate structures of thought, accounts for the lack of system in his own writing on topics which have to do with literature and criticism. He cannot be said to have followed any one school of criticism or to have created a new one; yet there are certain trends and emphases in his scattered judgments which offer themselves for examination.

A. Emerson and Romanticism

Essentially I think we must agree that Emerson was a romanticist. His theories of beauty, literature, and criticism are in the main the theories of Plato interpreted by the long line of romantic critics who came after him. That their interpretation was often false has been a curiosity of the history of criticism, but it has also been the motivating power in the development of much idealistic thought and of one of its offshoots, romanticism. At what point in its development this

idealism came to Emerson is a matter of conjecture and a thing about which critics cannot agree, but I shall deal throughout this section with what seem to me the more probable influences, supplementing these with reference to other possible ones.

Emerson's dislike for foreign languages and consequent shallow understanding of them combined with his distaste for a metaphysical vocabulary and his slowness in absorbing the implications of a philosophical system, resulted in his becoming acquainted with Plato, much of whom he had read half-comprehendingly in the original Greek, through Thomas Taylor's translation. Thomas Taylor was an ardent Neo-Platonist whose zeal often caused him to depart from literal translation and to render the Neo-Platonic interpretation. Consequently, although Emerson believed that Plato's influence was among the greatest in his life, we recognize as he could not the Neo-Platonic qualifications which enter. Nor was the influence of Neo-Platonism always at first hand. Coleridge was steeped in Neo-Platonism and so were Goethe and all the German transcendentalists, each one giving it the stamp of individual emphasis. Yet the roots of Platonic doctrine are in Emerson's thought unmistakably, however elaborately deceiving the flowers may seem at times.

The Concord writer's temperament, social background, ancestry, and early training all made him susceptible to this influence although he tempered it by emphases of his own as I shall try to show. He was naturally an idealist and his early training had encouraged him in this, laying great stress in

particular upon the moral nature of life. The Zeitgeist provided a medium through which the voices of the rebel romantics could be heard clearly; America in her struggle to win a culture of her own almost predetermined the development of individualism in those whose bent was more creative than practical.

Emerson's doctrine of esthetics comes recognizably from Plato's hierarchy of values as treated in the Symposium and as carried over by the Neo-Platonists. His treatment of art comes more particularly from Proclus and Plotinus; for Plato has more to say of ideal than of material beauty. The symbolical character of nature is in Plato's Timaeus and in the teachings of Plotinus. It is also made much of by the German Transcendentalists, Coleridge, and Carlyle. The doctrine of the One and the Many is one which the Transcendentalists gave great importance to; it may also be traced back to the Platonists' doctrine of the microcosm, as the concept of the Over-Soul can be traced to the Neo-Platonic idea of one Supreme Intellect. Emerson's search for ethical meaning in the laws of nature may well have been derived from Coleridge's similar idea, a correlation of the Platonic and the Baconian philosophies.

Coming more specifically to Emerson's theories of literature and criticism, Emerson states that literature is "the conversion of action into thought for the delight of the intellect." Plato has said that literature is good only insofar as it moulds the life of the good citizen. Longinus, a contemporary and admirer of Plotinus, became interested in the method of this moulding and concluded that the function of poetry is to instruct and

delight. Coleridge and Goethe were both students of Longinus; by some such ancestry the idea may have come to Emerson.

The distinction between romanticism and classicism was a popular field of discussion for the romantic critics of the nineteenth century who were in revolt against Neo-Classicism. Emerson realizes the dangers of romanticism as did Goethe; but its doctrines have become a part of the air he breathes. His realization of its weaknesses provideshim with certain checks and balances in which I shall trace the germs of other critical methods. Realism Emerson desires in his theory that literature should be close to life, but he means by this what Wordsworth meant, that only the ideal was the truly real. The problems of that type of literature which we more narrowly call realistic today, he did not consider - just as he failed to consider the problem of the ugly in his view of esthetics.

Emerson's treatment of drama shows that he was acquainted with Aristotle's Poetics at least superficially and possibly through secondary sources. Indeed his understanding of drama seems to be almost entirely limited to Greek tragedy. He does not carry his analysis far enough to show himself an adherent of classicism or of romanticism. His preference for history and biography and sacred writings lead us again to the moral insistence of Plato that literature should be hymns to the gods and praises of noble men, and reminds us of a saying of Frederick Schlegel's that "Literature is the comprehensive essence of the intellectual life of a nation."[1] Poetry is to Emerson the highest of literary forms. This judgment brings

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1. quoted in Scott-James, The Making of Literature, p. 141

him again into the realm of Longinus and of the romantic apologists, since it is poetry which brings Emerson most often into that region of lofty revelation and sublimity with which Longinus is chiefly concerned. Emerson's insistence that there are no subjects which are unpoetical is reminiscent of Wordsworth's insistence upon the poet's ability to treat the commonplace ideally.

Discussions of genius and inspiration were also fruitful fields for the romantic critics of the nineteenth century. Emerson does not run wholly true to type. Plato's poets were "light and winged and holy men," without invention until they were inspired and then they became madmen not knowing what they uttered. The genius of the German romantic Geniezeit followed along the best lines of the Rousseauistic tradition; he was eccentric, given over to moments of moodiness and the Sehnsucht so characteristic of Goethe's young Werther. But Emerson's New England reticence and his insistence on the moral principle saved him from these extravagances. His essay on Self-Reliance has often been quoted to show that his genius falls in line with the traditional definition of his time. In isolated passages it can be made to seem that this is true. Emerson's liking for aphorism has resulted in a frequent misunderstanding of the thought of his essays as a whole. It is far too easy to remember sayings like "To be great is to be misunderstood" without supplying the qualifying context. Emerson believed that a genius is born with supernormal sensitiveness to the meaning of the world and an extraordinary ability to seize

upon this and embody it in new forms. He believed that there were certain moments of exhileration and inspiration when, coming into communion with the Over-Soul, usually in solitude and with Nature, he received new insight into the heart of things and was able to write about it. He believed, moreover, one large element in genius was its self-reliance which kept it close to truth. So far Emerson is a romantic with respect to his theories of genius and inspiration. But here the ressemblance ceases. Emerson's young poet is self-reliant in his intuitions and in his expression of them; but he is not eccentric. He does not gain inspiration from prolonged morbid introspection into the causes of his loneliness and difference from ordinary men. He knows the balance between society and solitude which suits his temperament. He does not gain inspiration from drugs or from other forms of artificial stimulation, that he may become an explorer of new and strange sensations whose infinitely fine shadings incite him to their description. He does not even intoxicate himself with prolonged reading. Emerson's poet is a man who lives more deeply the common life; he keeps his body so finely sensitive by plain and healthful living that the beauty of nature becomes a visible higher language to him, and with thankful heart in these rare moments, he transcribes the message which he hears. Emerson's genius does not seek new subjects in travel or in the past or the future. He knows the value of the Present because he is more truly aware of its meaning than the ordinary man. He does not as Coleridge advised choose a subject "remade from

the private interests and circumstances of the writer himself." Instead, with Wordsworth, he seeks the universal in the everyday and he sublimates the subjective until it becomes significant for all men. The New England writer reacted strongly against the practices of his contemporary romantic extremists, the food faddists, the Brookfarmers, the wild-eyed, long-haired prophets. Staunchly he wrote his creed for all who felt the promptings of genius and knew their high office as interpreters: "He will instruct and strengthen me, who, there where he is, unaided in the midst of poverty, toil, and traffic, extricates himself from the corruption of the same and builds on his land a house of peace and benefit, good customs, and free thoughts." Wordsworth's Summum Bonum was the state of awareness of the spiritual significance in common things. Emerson agrees.

Emerson's doctrine of the nature of inspiration and of the imagination is closely akin to what Coleridge calls the "esemplastic imagination" which may have been derived from Longinus' emphasis upon coupling thought with passion, and his comtemporary Wordsworth's idea that flashes of insight must be prefaced and succeeded by moments of "deep and spiritual reflection." Coleridge meant by his term (εἰς ἓν πλάττειν — to shape into one) that synthesizing creative power which our minds manifest at intervals, in showing us the meaning of a hitherto unrelated mass of experience. This idea is a development away from the extreme form of Platonism professed by romanticists like William Blake, who declared that in moments

of ecstasy his poems were dictated to him, or like Jones Very, Emerson's contemporary, who declared his writings were nothis, but were sayings of the Holy Ghost. With Emerson, as with Coleridge, the personal always enters. Some bit of the divine message is lost because individuality gets in the way. Emerson's distinction between Imagination and Fancy fall along the general lines of Coleridge's also,- although he systematizes less and carries the thought further. Emerson's analysis of the differences between the two is not unlike that of the differences he makes between the classic and the romantic. His doctrine of originality is romantic in its insistence on self-reliance, but goes beyond typical romanticism in his realization of originality in all men.

Emerson's picture of the writer closely resembles Wordsworth's. The creative man of letters is to find the primary laws of our nature in common incidents and situations. Emerson's doctrine of the symbolizing power of words goes back to Plato's Cratylus and is found again in the German Transcendentalists and Coleridge. Emerson rejects or does not understand Plato's doctrine that art is an imitation of nature; he accepts instead, Plotinus' idea taken over by Coleridge that art is a representation and an interpretation, at the same time less and more than nature. His whole theory of stylistics shows that he accepts Longinus' principle that nature supplies, but that art regulates the mode of expression. That style is the revealer of a man's inner self was a by-word with French critics and was a favorite principle of Goethe's. Emerson's attention to the

language of common people is in close accord with Wordsworth's insistence on "the language of men" the "language of prose," and that the poet should "keep the reader in the company of flesh and blood." Aside from these origins nearly all the other characteristic doctrines of Emerson on style seem to have come from his study of Montaigne and Bacon.

Emerson's theory of criticism echoes Jonson's in part, that "it is only the faculty of poets to judge of poets." He agrees with Coleridge and anticipates the doctrines of Expressionism in his dictum that the spectator should judge in the spirit in which the artist produced. His revolt from "the consideration of the Greeks and Romans" is typically Romantic and his announcement that he would always judge of a book "as a peasant does, not as a book by pedantic and individual methods" sounds curiously like Tolstoi's insistence that what is unintelligible to the peasant is not art.

From its very nature as a revolt, romanticism is a movement of extremes. There was the extreme of aristocracy which the young genius felt when he dwelt with the realization that he was of finer fibre than those about him. There was the other extreme, which Wordsworth sometimes degenerated into, of sentimental democracy. On the whole, Emerson steered his path pretty nearly in the middle course. He rarely if ever became a snob, but he did at times come dangerously near being a sentimentalist.

Just how far Emerson was not a Romantic I shall discuss in the paragraphs which follow; but the weight of evidence is

unmistakably on the romantic side. In nearly all his important pronouncements he was a Romantic although usually he chose the less conspicuous forms of romanticism.

Emerson's view of nature and the natural, as well as that of the Romanticists who influenced or agreed with him should be sharply distinguished from the extreme realistic naturalism into which one school of extreme romanticism later degenerated. Realistic Naturalism, in its revolt against the vague niceties of diction and particularly against unreal idealism in fiction, became a brief for primitivism and animalism. In protest that life was not the sentimentally noble thing that the prevailing literary school sometimes declared it, that to be represented in its totality life must be portrayed in its lower aspects as well, this movement came dangerously near placing man on an animal level and proclaiming that this was the only sincere portrait of humanity. Emerson, Wordsworth, and Coleridge took chief cognizance of the spiritual element in man which makes him potentially divine. In their creed man's real self lies in his aspiration, in the degree to which his animal impulses are sublimated and brought into the control of his higher nature. To live sincerely, to come into an understanding of nature which shall lead to an understanding of the God behind her, is not to live on the level of the senses. It is rather to achieve a height of spiritual isolation from which man can understand nature as the language of a Supreme Mind; to become completely aware of man's own place in the scheme of creation.

B. Classicism and Neo-Classicism

The doctrines of the Neo-Classic age which come nearest historically to Emerson's own day and against which the whole School of Romanticism formed itself in revolt, are conspicuously absent from Emerson's criticism. Boileau had preached to seventeenth century literary France a warning of self-distrust, of careful study, and of imitation of the methods of the ancients. He blazed the way by studying them himself, by deducing rules therefrom which the ancients had probably never heard of, and by setting the formulas thus derived down in precisely rhymed couplets. Although Dryden was influenced only partially by these rigid epigrams, eighteenth century England, with Pope in the lead, gave them out as literary commandments. Emerson writes in his journal on April 5, 1856:

> "I think I can show that France cleaves to the form and loses the substance; as, in the famous unities of her drama; and in her poetry itself; in the whole Classicality of her turn of mind, which is only apery."

I have quoted him again as approving as much diversity of literary form as there is of individuality. Form for a given work of art was to him dictated directly by the artist's sense of form given him in nature; he trusts each writer to write out his truth as he hears it. Hence it is natural that Emerson's passages in praise of Classicism as against the excesses of romanticism define the former in terms of the organic whole. This biological analogy goes back directly to the doctrines of Plato and of Aristotle, later echoed by Matthew Arnold. It strikes deeper than the etiquette of the Neo-Classics. Emerson's scale of esthetic values,

his theory of history, his definition of the material for poetry as "a thought so passionate and alive that like the spirit of a plant or animal it has an architecture of its own," his saying that "Genius alone finishes," his declaration that criticism must give her assent only to those works whose method and subject were fore-ordained in nature, are all penetrated with this same thought. It is from Classicism, then, that Emerson derives the checks and balances to his Romanticism. It is only as the more liberal of the English Neo-Classicists approach Classicism that he finds any agreement with them. He might for instance, have accepted Dryden's notion of literature as an organic force which develops within each nation; he analyzed with some skill differences between English, French, and German literatures; but I doubt whether he would have let this stand as Dryden did without hastily adding that the greatest literature was international and not to be accounted for by national characteristics. He agrees, ideally, with Dryden that the artist makes something more beautiful than life; but he sees about him little art that has fulfilled its destiny of interpreting nature's beauty with a higher beauty; hence, nature becomes to him for his own age, the criterion of art. Emerson's writing might well have been an illustration of Samuel Johnson's text "Great thoughts are always general and consist in positions not limited by exceptions, and in descriptions not descending to minuteness."

Yet, although there are undeniably classical elements in Emerson's thought, his individualism never permitted him to become a Hellenist to the extent that Matthew Arnold did. He

might have found hearty agreement with Arnold's position that the pleasure derived from a work of art consists in the total impression derived from the organic unity of the parts within the whole; but he would have dissented from the thought that one subject was more worthy than another or that there was an absolute standard of "appropriate treatment." He doubtless believed in the "high seriousness" of Aristotle, as Arnold did; but although he loved the simple themes of the old world, he would not have been bound by limiting himself to them;- he believed too wholly in the Present. Arnold is the truer critic in that he would keep his judgment unswayed by the blind impulses of the populace. Emerson's strain of romanticism kept his impersonality from becoming akin to Arnold's disinterestedness. Obviously Arnold attaches greater importance to the significance of the critic than does Emerson, although he agrees with Emerson in his emphasis upon the critic's relation to society rather than to the poet.

As staunchly as Emerson loved the classics I believe he would have accepted more readily the impressionist St. Beuve's definition of a classic than the traditional one: "A true classic .....is an author who has enriched the human mind, increased its treasure, or revealed some eternal passion in that heart where all seemed known and discovered; who has expressed his thought, observation, or invention, in no matter what form, only provided it be broad and great, refined and sensible, sane and beautiful in itself; who has spoken to all in his own peculiar style, a style which is found to be also that of the whole world, a style

new without neologism, new and old, easily contemporary with all time."

C. Emerson and the Modern Schools of Criticism

1. The Judicial School

Emerson's first recorded thoughts on literary criticism are sturdy denials that any standards can be laid down for the poet. He does as he can and must; no critic can be his teacher. Nature, the natural order in the universe, is the only standard of judgment. This dictates the transcendent, ideal poem. To this, as interpreted by the intuitions of their souls, both poet and critic look, and the critic records for society how nearly the poet has approximated the ideal. Emerson squarely turns his back on the judicial school of criticism.

2. The Interpretative School

Emerson more nearly approaches the standard of those who declare that the critic's function is to act as an interpreter of the author for society. His lectures on authors and books have much interpretative criticism in them; but This is only one of the methods of criticism which Emerson uses.

3. The Appreciative School

Emerson comes nearer to the tenets of the appreciative school when he writes with reference to criticism: "My prayer is that I may be never deprived of a fact, but be always so rich in objects of study as never to feel this impoverishment of remembering myself." But Emerson's appreciation becomes impressionism

as I shall try to show later in my section on impressionism.

4. The School of Expressionism

One of the greatest of the modern expressionists, Benedetto Croce, makes use of the doctrine of organic unity as does Emerson. And Emerson seems to be voicing the creed of the expressionists when he writes: "'Every Scripture is to be interpreted by the same spirit which gave it forth', is the fundamental law of criticism." He does not, however, fulfill the expressionist's desire for a criticism *in vacuo*. When it comes to writing a review he flings away classical rules and standards as blithely as does Spingarn, the disciple of Croce, but not the idea of moral force. His emphasis in criticism, however, is always upon the impression which the work creates in him. Expressionism is for him only the beginning of the art of criticism.

5. The School of Self-Expressionism

Does he, then, become a self-expressionist on the order of H. L. Mencken? G. R. Elliot in his essay on *The Pride of Modernity* accuses him of this: "He was too proud to doubt that his individual inspirations were universally valid. He attributed these too much to deity and not at all to Rousseau."[1] But surely, however self-deluded, in the ordinary sense of the term (a critic who expresses himself in his criticism rather than the book at hand), he is not a self-expressionist. Who can imagine

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1. Foerster, *Humanism and America*, p. 75

an Emerson writing a criticism as Mencken does, merely for the pleasure of sorting out his own ideas to "discharge them with a flourish"? Insofar as self-expressionism in its milder form approaches impressionism Emerson can find common ground with it, but this borderline type is hardly accounted for by any accepted meaning of the term.

6. The School of Impressionism

Emerson belongs rather to the modern school of impressionism, more truly to this school than to any other. If he learned his ideas concerning the function of the critic and his method of procedure from St. Beuve, he left fewer traces of this influence than of almost any other. I prefer to think that he came to many of the doctrines which we call impressionistic in the course of natural development and under the general influence of nineteenth century critical thought. He was always sensitive to atmosphere and spirit. Before the beginning of his literary career he wrote in his journal, "I please myself rather with contemplating the penumbra of the thing than the thing itself." He goes on to develop the kind of criticism which Wordsworth might have grown into, had he displayed a greater interest in criticism - that of memory and of meditation upon first impressions. He sought "the genius and suggestion of the whole." Toward the end of his life he states his belief in a passage which any impressionist would give assent to:

> "Criticism is an art when it does not stop at the words of the poet, but looks at the order of his thoughts and the essential quality of his mind. ....'Tis a question not of talents but of tone; and

> not particular merits, but the mood of mind
> into which one and another can bring us."

The ideal critic is to "eliminate and express the peculiar quality of that life which the book awoke in him."

He was not the system-maker that St. Beuve was nor was he equally affected by the methods of science. He probably did not agree with one of the latter's fundamental premises - that there are born critics, just as there are born poets. But he would have assented eagerly to the French critic's belief that an artist creates only in accordance with the laws of his own being, and that no law imposed from without can be counted upon to fit his case. Although Emerson never wrote an absolute formula, as St. Beuve did, to the effect that the personality behind a work of art can be defined through its "Faculté Maîtresse" and a characteristic name affixed to it, he does something of the same sort in his lectures on Representative Men when he makes Plato his ideal philosopher; Shakespeare a poet; Montaigne a skeptic; Swedenborg a mystic; Napoleon the man of the world; and Goethe the writer. This is a more general, Theophrastan sort of characterization than St. Beuve was accustomed to make, yet it borders on the same type. Emerson's more informal pronouncements often contain happy key-words which match St. Beuve's similar phrases in accuracy. His analysis of Milton, which I have quoted under the section on The Writer in Part II, is a case in point. The passage begins with a few sentences which show how closely his desire for a future criticism falls in line with the Frenchman's: "Criticism is in its infancy. The anatomy of genius it has not unfolded, Milton in the egg, it has not found, Milton is a good

apple on that tree of England. It would be impossible by any chemistry we know to compound that apple. Otherwise, it required all the tree; and out of a thousand of apples, good and bad, this specimen apple is at last produced." He catches "the strong, earthy expression," "the household charm" of English literature; the "middle-class nature" which made the "homely landscape" of Burns, the combination in Coleridge of a Catholic mind and a traditional Englishman, the "musky" verses of Tennyson, the fact that Carlyle was "a painter in the Dutch style". Although Emerson proposed no scientific dissection of biography as did St. Beuve, he likes to contemplate the possible influences of an author's background. This is illustrated in his analysis of Milton's genius (above) and in the section on the life of Shakespeare in Representative Men. The very lack of system in Emerson's criticism reminds us of Anatole France's description of a critic detailing "his adventures among masterpieces". There is something of this browsing, tasting adventures in the Concord man of letters. Emerson's desire to become aware of all the life about him brings Pater's Marius into our thoughts with all his attentiveness, and his responsiveness; as his insistence upon the uniqueness of the individual style brings us to Pater himself, his search for the right word, his ideal art as consisting in "the removal of surplusage".

But the moral qualities in literature are not the concern of the impressionistic school of critics who so often accepted as their motto "Art for Art's sake," and when it comes to the final interpretation of a work of art, Emerson goes on his separate moral way.

D. Emerson's Attitude toward Historical and Biographical Criticism

Emerson is interested in literary movements and environmental influences, as he shows in the case of the backgrounds in which he places his Representative Men, his characterization of periods in English literature, of Milton, and of Burns, and in his distinctions between the Classic and Romantic. And yet his peculiar way of regarding all History as present in his own age has led many critics to the conclusion that he was lacking in a sense of historical perspective. In his own scheme of things, however, he was perfectly consistent. To him history is the record of that mind common to all men: thus the past is swallowed up in the present. His judgment is transcendental and his critical principles derived from his intuition of nature; history, therefore cannot affect them. The truly great is for all time. The only history which Emerson ever contemplated writing, although there are brief sketches of certain literary historical periods scattered through his journals, was a history of Calvinism. He was not unskilled in analyzing the personalities Calvinism produced as we know from the journal passages and memorial address on Dr. Ripley, the "iron-gray deacon" of Concord's Calvinistic faith who took a paternal interest in the whole village. I wish that Emerson had actually executed the history he had in mind when he wrote to Carlyle in January 31, 1844:

> "Sometimes I dream of writing the only historical thing I know,- the influence of old Calvinism, now almost obsolete, upon the education of the existing

> generation in New England. I am quite sure, if it could be truly done, it would be new to your people, and a valuable memorandum to ours."

Perhaps he might have proved to the world that he did have a sense of history; still I think his record would probably have been told through a series of "representative men".

He is more ably interested in the personality of authors as reflected in their books. Modern psychological criticism was unknown to him, but he did have a peculiar knack of capturing essences. He enjoyed analyzing the particular to find its roots in the universal. The two types of personality which appeal to him most strongly are that of the religious mystics and that of the men of elemental vigor. The first type he was temperamentally in sympathy with. This explains his understanding of Plato, Milton, Herbert, Swedenborg, and George Fox. The second type he admired because he felt himself lacking in its chief characteristics. This explains his praise of Montaigne, Carlyle, Byron, and Whitman.

E. Emerson and the New Literary Humanists

I have tried to show earlier in this section to what extent Emerson's critical principles coincide with those of the modern schools of criticism in America. Although this coincidence has, for the most part, been shown inconsiderable, it is interesting to observe that Emerson, because of his doctrines of self-reliance and his "literary declaration of independence", has been accused of fathering the spirit of modern critical

revolt against tradition in this country. With the single exception of the Impressionist movement in which case America seems to have been influenced directly by St. Beuve and his English disciples, there may well be a degree of truth in this. Emerson was the most conspicuous and influential man of letters this side of the Atlantic in the nineteenth century and his reputation has not suffered loss; oftentimes his independence has been carried over in spirit rather than in substance. Yet in essentials I believe that the Humanists are more truly in line with the whole Emerson tradition than any of the other schools of criticism popular today. The Humanists themselves are not neglectful of this fact. A verse of Emerson's was inscribed on the flyleaf of Babbitt's first publication, Literature and the American College, and has been requoted by many a humanist since:

> "There are two laws discrete
> Not reconciled,-
> Law for man, and law for thing;
> The last builds town and fleet,
> But it runs wild,
> And doth the man unking."

Although he repudiates a long list of self-deceived Emersonians and Emersonianisms Paul Elmer More likewise confesses his love for Emerson.

Emerson was a humanist more in practice than in conscious theory. He would not have given the critic so great a place in his literary world as do the Humanists, whose emphasis is often more critical than creative. He would not have dreamed of stating with Frank Jewett Mather that the ideal humanist artist in humanist society "willingly admits that his own

genius is not his final authority. He checks its impulses by the practice and teaching of other geniuses and by the degree of acceptance which its expression commands from competent criticism and patronage."[1] Emerson approaches things, rather, from the writer's standpoint, and although he may wish a literature at once so grand and simple that it might inspire the peasant, he is quite ready to agree with Arnold Bennett's "passionate few"[2] that "literary history.....is a record of the power of minorities, and of minorities of one. Every book is written with a constant secret reference to the few intelligent persons whom the writer believes to exist in the million." Perhaps, after all, these few represent Mather's "competent patronage"; but Emerson carries his romanticism further: the poet "is isolated among his contemporaries by truth and by his art, but with this consolation in his pursuits, that they will draw all men sooner or later". With Emerson the poet is the solitary pioneer often uncheered by his fellows by very reason of the fact that he leads the way to a new art often beyond contemporary vision.

Nor would Emerson have agreed with Mather's optimistic hope for a society which should furnish the poet with inspiration, a society which "provides the artist with incentive, furnishes most of his aesthetic notions, helps him to realize himself through opportune criticism and companionship". In humanism made for a city civilization as Emerson's criticism was

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1. Foerster, Humanism in America, p. 113
2. Bennett, A., Literary Taste and How to Form It

made for a country life, society takes the place of nature. Emerson may have observed in his representative men the virtues of "proportionateness", or praise, of "mellow common sense"; he may have admired their "breadth of normal experience" and "profound vital conservatism"; but it would have seemed heresy to him to tell his audiences of potential heroes, poets, and philosophers, that these virtues were to be deliberately sought. His emphasis upon the inner life was first of all an appeal to the individual that no law be sacred to him but that of his nature. His genius was a man who trusted himself profoundly, who believed what was true for him was true for all men,- not that what was true for all men must be true for him. His humility and reverence were for his intuitions of God revealed in nature and in great men; not in the standards of the past or of a class of contemporary society.

And yet Emerson's emphasis upon character building rather than upon the romantic panecea of revolutionizing society, his urging that poets seek the universal truth <u>at home and now</u>, rather than in far lands or in the past or the future, recalls the humanist's creed of poise rather than uniqueness, of greater breadth of normal life rather than abnormal experience, or More's decree that "The great creators have taken the substance of life, and, not by denying it or attempting to make its laws, but by looking more intently below its surface, have found meanings and values that transmute it into something at once the same and different." Humanism's use of "organic unity" and its accompanying biological analogies are more truly classical and

nearer Emerson than Croce's application of the terms to his expressionist aesthetics. The humanist recognizes values which stand outside the frame of all centures and Harry Hayden Clark writes "Truthful representation of typical humanity alone produces that harmony which yields the highest beauty."[1] Emerson would have called these values transcendental. He believed thoroughly in the depiction of the representative and typical as he shows by his theory of history and by his delight in finding that Scott's characters were types. His theory of imitation as representation is Aristotelian and Humanistic. But, most important of all, Emerson would have given whole-hearted assent to the humanist emphasis on the relations of art and morality. Gorham Munson would have his ideal humanist critic distinguished "by an immense capacity for relating deeds to words. His interest would not cease with a beautiful formulation, but would continue until the formulation was embodied in experience."[2] Emerson would have agreed with the same gentleman that "literature may be found to have been in decline.....almost from its classical sources and from the Scriptures of ancient lands." One of Babbitt's sentences would also have won his approval: "Criticism of art extends to various aspects of our national life and would converge finally on our higher education." This was all in the part of the Arnold tradition which Emerson accepted.

Yet Emerson, for all his frequent transcendental vague-

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1. Foerster, Humanism in America, p. 170
2. Ibid., p. 231

ness, goes beyond present-day humanism at just this point; and it seems to me that it is a vital one. Babbitt sets up as his criterion of art an "External standard which rests on our immediate perception of what is normal and human"; but Emerson goes beyond to the supernormal and divine. Humanism puts its final trust in the worth of human judgment; Emerson puts his in a God whose triple face is Truth, Beauty, and Goodness and who has made the world restless for himself and capable of finding him in its intuition. Humanism seeks poise and proportion; but Emerson brings back as well the spontaneity and intensity of aspiration which its deliberate maturity has tended to declare hectic and childish. Humanism deals with the present; Emerson deals with the significance of the present for the future. Humanists have accused Emerson of spiritual pride and have externized into a "universal center of value" his faith in his intuition of the beautiful. But Emerson, poor metaphysician as he appears in comparison with many a humanist, went more deeply into the source of his standards. Ludwig Lewisohn quotes Thomas Mann as declaring "Psychologically love of the 'I' and love of the world cannot be differentiated at all."[1] Emerson realized that a youth loved men of genius because they were more truly himself than he was; he knew that his heroes and poets were representative of the real insight of those who had made them such and had fed the sources of their genius; and he trusted his intuitions with all humility. He comes out strong and clear

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1. Lewisohn, Expressionism in America

about the Over-Soul of Beauty who gives meaning to all art, where Humanism bound by its allegiance to Reason and Reasonableness falters, hedges, and changes the subject. But from what other possible source can come this "external standard" of the Humanists? I agree with Lewisohn that Humanism has in this respect never reached the degree of self-knowledge which Emerson made his starting-point.

Emerson was in truth the critic of life which Arnold sought and the humanists herald, even though his criticism of literature was comparatively slight. He lived a life of balanced society and solitude, of poise and moderation which any humanist might approve, although, according to his own record, he achieved his proportionateness by following his intuitions and trusting in the eventual origin; rather than by the discipline of his will. He once called his natural inertia "the bulwark of individualism"; perhaps it was also the foundation of his unconscious humanism. With him, the Poet - not the Critic should be the law-giver, should announce and lead the civil code; poetry and prudence should be coincident. Surely such would be a humanistic poet, could we grant him rather than his critic, the leadership. Emerson wished for unity of character as earnestly as does any new humanist and he went a fair way toward realizing it; he sought and revealed when he found them the underlying principles in art and in life by valuing and studying the experiences which came to him in a life whose outward circumstances were in no way extraordinary. This was all good humanism and worthy to be cited by humanist critics. But the difference with

the new humanists lay fundamentally in a point of emphasis. Emerson did not seek primarily for stability and proportion of character: he did not even seek the good life as an end in itself; he sought to become aware of the Over-Soul in his creation, the world; to love him, "to enjoy him forever," and to show as many as could understand that this was the secret of life. It is true that T. S. Eliot and certain of the humanists are super-naturalists and insist that true humanism is impossible without religious insight, and even Babbitt, who thinks that humanism can exist without religion, thinks religious humanism desirable, but nevertheless most humanists fail to arrive at religious immediacy and insight as Emerson surely did. The New Humanism might complete a broader philosophy if it would give more attention to this side of Emerson's teaching.

A Summary of the Dissertation

A SUMMARY OF THE DISSERTATION

This dissertation has proceeded on the assumption that the greatest purpose in dealing with Emerson as a critic would be served if the author were to study, first, those forces intellectual and personal which formed Emerson's critical mind, if, second, the author collected all of the critical passages scattered everywhere in the writings of Emerson into a corpus of critical thought and organized Emerson's criticism into appropriate categories and relations with appropriate running comment, and if, finally, on the basis of the evidence thus collected from Emerson's writings, the author made an estimate of Emerson's place as a critic.

These tasks the author has completed and she feels that she has made a contribution to knowledge in Part II of her dissertation by assembling in one place, classifying, and commenting on the significance of practically all of the critical passages in the writings of Emerson, and in Part III of her dissertation by estimating Emerson's place in the long line of literary critics. If the author is right in thinking that she has accomplished these ends, it will now be possible for students of American literature to use her dissertation as a source book of information in Emersonian criticism. The author suggests that without doubt similar studies might be done for other American authors. A series of such studies would serve students of the American literature in helping them understand the development of the American critical mind in the field of literary critical thought, a field that has never been covered adequately.

I

In Part I the author has shown that there was little in the way of literary culture in America at the time when Emerson was born. The country had advanced rapidly in material welfare, but her literature was imitative and inferior. Yet there were men anxious for her literary future. It was in the home of one of these, the Reverend William Emerson, that Ralph Waldo Emerson was born in 1803, and in which he received his early training, coming under the influence of Mary Moody Emerson and Sarah Ripley who furthered his natural interest in reading, writing, and the study of the classics. At Harvard he came into contact with Edward Everett who introduced him to further studies in the classical languages and opened the field of Oriental literature to him. George Ticknor, Smith Professor of Modern Languages and Literature, was another influence of Emerson's college days. His interest in religion was a part of Emerson's heritage through his minister father and is traceable throughout his life. He studied for the ministry after his graduation from Harvard and shortly after he completed his graduate studies, was ordained Assistant Pastor of the Second Church (Unitarian) in Boston. But Emerson had never had a taste for theological or philosophical systems and the Unitarian dogmas proved especially distasteful to his developing individualism. Not long after he became full pastor of the Second Church, a controversy over the observance of the Lord's Supper (a sacrament which he deemed meaningless) led to his resignation from the fold. For nearly ten years, later, however, he

continued to preach whenever he received an invitation to do so at any of the neighboring churches, and throughout his career the moral significance of life holds his first interest.

Emerson's first book, Nature, was published in 1836, two years after his nine-months' stay in Europe, which was his first contact with the art treasures of the old world. The little book shows clearly the influences which had gone into the moulding of Emerson's thought. The religious significance of life forms the conclusion of an outlined idealistic philosophy of man and nature which is closely patterned after that of the transcendental thought which he had absorbed from his readings in Coleridge and the German Romantic philosophers. Emerson states in it the chief tenets of the philosophy of which all his later works are expansions: nature is a symbol of the Divine Spirit, the Over-Soul who communicates himself to man through her language. Art is man's expression of the beauty which he finds in nature and serves to educate man more closely to understand nature so that he may build within his moral character the beauty which he finds here. Since the moral is infinitely higher than the material, when man has incorporated into his soul this beauty which art and nature reveal to him, he will become divine and will share in creation. Communion with the Over-Soul comes not by reason but by intuition of the significance of the beauty which we see all about us. Truth, Beauty, and Goodness are the "triple face" of the Over-Soul. In Nature, also, Emerson shows the influence of Plato and of the Neo-Platonists as a combined result of the influence of

the influence of Platonism on Transcendentalism and his own classical studies. Rousseauism is at the roots of Transcendentalism, and Emerson shows his contact with Romantic thought by the importance which he gives to intuition and in the individualism which he developed from intuition as a premise. The influence of oriental literature confirmed Emerson's innate mysticism and furnished him with the Eastern folk-lore and figures of speech which he liked to use in his lectures, his books, and his poems.

Emerson's career as a lecturer began shortly after the publication of Nature and continued until the last years of his life. Two of the most important of his first lectures were The American Scholar which sounded the note of "American literary independence" and The Divinity School Address in which he exposed ideas radical in his day but which have since then become the scripture of much modern Unitarianism. His literary career of lecturing and writing brought him into contact with men like Thomas Carlyle, Walter Landor, and Hermann Grimm across the sea, and Henry Thoreau, Bronson Alcott, and Walt Whitman in America. These men and his library of books furnished him with stimuli to develop the fundamental ideas which he had stated in Nature. Emerson as a writer has held his place not as philosopher or as poet, but because of that quality of sincere prose which has caught the attention of readers ever since, and has made him as one critic has phrased it "the friend and aider of all those who live the life of the spirit."

II

The inadequacy of Emerson's esthetic training is apparent from the cultural poverty of his social background. His contact with art was made for the most part through literature, particularly through poetry. His love for nature, the most beautiful material resource which America had to offer him, is evident throughout the development of his theories of art, literature, and criticism. His son Edward remarks upon his sense of form and Norman Foerster comments upon his sensitiveness to color. His delight in rhythm is confined to the larger elements, to rhetorical pulse beats and to the powerful sweep of epic metres; the smaller elements of rhythm he often misses, possibly because of his defective musical ear. The Esthetic Principle of Unity and Variety is included in Emerson's love of organic unity in art.

He recognizes three orders of beauty: natural, artistic, and moral. The world of art reveals, by truthful representation, the meaning of the world of nature that we may more truthfully incorporate its principles into our lives and produce moral beauty, the highest form. Beauty is the form under which the intellect prefers to study the world; it is one aspect of the Over-Soul, whose "triple face" is Truth, Goodness, and Beauty. The esthetic standard is the totality of nature: how far does this one object of art suggest the universal beauty? Emerson deals only superficially with the esthetic problems of the grotesque, the comic, and the tragic. The grotesque because of its unnaturalness, cannot endure. The

essence of comedy is a "well-intentioned halfness." Tragedy consists in temperament, not in events.

Literature is "the conversion of action into thought for the delight of the intellect." Literature by giving us a broader outlook on experience teaches us the truest way to live. Emerson contrasts Classicism with Romanticism by its organic unity. Of literature which we have come to call realistic he shows little understanding.

Emerson's interest in particular types of literature was confined chiefly to history, biography, and poetry. History is the life of an individual written in larger print so that he by studying may come to a more complete self-understanding. The heroes of history present to him the ideal of what he can become. Poetry is the highest of all arts because it is the most purely intuitive and therefore is the truest symbol of the Divine Mind which it seeks to express. Emerson believes, however, that our reading should act as a stimulus to our creative powers, never become a drug or way of escape from the reality of our thoughts.

The man of genius is to Emerson the man most truly in accord with the nature of things who trusts in the worth of his intuitions and expresses in act and word his conviction of their truth and significance. Inspiration is a term for those high moments of contact with the Over-Soul in which it seems as if art were formed almost under divine compulsion. Its chief sources are: solitary communion with nature, conversation with sincere minds, certain well-loved books of poetry, and an abun-

dance of health - the result of a simple life lived close to nature. Originality is the self-reliance of genius; imagination is the power of genius to express the divine in accurate symbols.

Emerson's ideal writer has the happy faculty of finding material in whatever enters his life. Poetry is not a matter of subject, but of insight. Sincerity is the first rule of good writing. Since for Emerson all nature is a metaphor of the Divine Mind and words symbols of natural facts, excellence in style becomes a matter of choosing those words which are closest to nature. There is no choice of words in good writing. The language of children, of primitive literature, and of men who live close to nature is rich in vocabulary for the writer. Proverbs and legends which have grown up in the growth of a nation are similarly vital. Design, compression, understatement, he urges as rhetorical devices.

Although Emerson thought of himself as a creative writer rather than as a critic, there are certain principles of criticism traceable in his writings. Criticism is impractical for the poet who writes as his inspiration directs him; but it can be interpretative in content. Criticism must become transcendental, referring to the ideal, not to history; it should concern itself with the good and not waste itself in rejection. The method of criticism is meditation on first impressions and the bringing together of all those factors which contribute to the essential quality and spirit of the piece at hand. For the future of American literature Emerson prescribed self-reliance and a harkening to intuition. Emerson's best-loved and best-known literature

is English. He analyzes the earthy, common-sense rigor of the English style; sets up Shakespeare as the ideal poet; praises the style of Bacon's essays and the spiritual grandeur of Milton. Of contemporary English writers Carlyle and Wordsworth are his heroes. On the whole his interest in English literature is interest in the seventeenth century. Montaigne is his outstanding name in France; Goethe in Germany, and Dante in Italy. Among ancient writers he prefers the prophets of the Bible, Plato and Plutarch. His interest in Oriental literatures had a great deal of influence on American interest in comparative literature, particularly in the literature of Orientalism.

III

Emerson was not a systematic or conscious literary critic; he cannot be said to have followed any one school of criticism or to have created a new one. His theories of beauty, literature, and criticism are in the main the theories of Plato interpreted by the long line of romantic critics who come after him; but genius and inspiration, originality, the writer, and the critic show this influence markedly. Emerson never goes to romantic extremes. The checks and balances which he provides himself with come from other schools of criticism.

Perhaps the most important of these is the Classical in contradistinction to the Neo-Classical group whose creed in its pure form was altogether foreign to him. The "organic unity" which is so important a principle in Emerson's criticism is classical in origin. But his individualism kept him from becoming a Hellenist in the Arnold sense and he would probably have defined

a Classic as St. Beuve did in his essay on What is a Classic.

Coming to the modern critical schools who concern themselves with the method and function of the critic, Emerson has nothing in common with the judicial school; he does not fulfill the requirements of the expressionists or of the self-expressionists. His appreciation links him with the impressionistic school rather than with the appreciative school. Indeed it is with the impressionists that he belongs more than with any other modern school of method and function. He is sensitive to atmosphere and spirit and interested in analyzing the influences of background and temperament. But his interest in the moral significance of art carries him beyond the impressionist slogan, "Art for Art's Sake."

In the field of the content of his criticism Emerson cannot be grouped with the historians since he has little sense of historical perspective. His interest is more in the biographical. He is interested, particularly in the analysis of two types of personality, the religious mystic such as Milton and the man of elemental vigor, such as Montaigne.

Emerson finds his place among the new literary humanists more nearly than in any other modern school of criticism, although his humanism is more often a matter of temperament and practice than of conscious theory. He lived a life of spiritual poise and search for the morally significant; he preached a doctrine of greater breadth of normal life, of the organic unity in true art; but he kept the spontaneity and intensity of aspiration which humanists, with a few exceptions, by resolutely

keeping their eyes upon a human level, have let go. The humanists might well gain from a closer study of Emerson, immediacy of religious experience and insight.

IV

So far as the author of this dissertation can find out from her study of Emerson he originated no new theories in criticism, although, in placing himself under the critical influences of his day, he did pass each influence through his personality in such a manner as to make it individual and new in vigor, force, and expression. It is also true that Emerson is justly noted, as is well-known, for his stimulation of American letters toward non-imitation of European writers and away from a European tradition toward an American tradition, that he furthered interest in comparative literature in America, especially in Eastern literature, and that he came near to a new theory in the foundations of criticism when he insisted that life perceived through experience and intuition is more marvellous than its representation through art. The last, however, is very near to the Platonic theory of imitation, and yet in the writer's estimation it was a conclusion arrived at through Emerson's independent experience and therefore original with him. In any case, Emerson did make old things new; but his very best counsel to men, whether young or old, was to trust their sense of the Universal through their experience of life and through their intuitional immediacy of the Divine in nature and human nature.

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Appendix

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in the First Edition of the Dial

Emerson's Contributions to the Dial

Those marked with an asterisk (*) seem to be his, though I have no very clear evidence. Those marked with a a dagger (#) appear to me doubtful. A few more pieces are attributed to him by Mr. Cooke (Journal of Speculative Philosophy, 1885, p. 261) upon grounds which do not seem to me sufficient.

Vol. I. P. 1, The Editors to the Reader; 84, To---- (To Eva, Collected Writings ix.87); 122, The Problem; 139, Thoughts on Modern Literature; 158, Silence (Eros, ix.300); 220, New Poetry; 242, Wood-notes; 264, Dana's Two Years before the Mast*; 265, Fourier's Social Destiny of Man#; 339, The Snowstorm; 347, Suum Cuique; 348, The Sphinx; 367, Thoughts on Art; 401, Michelangelo#; 402, Robbin's Worship of the Soul#; 525, Man the Reformer.

Vol. II. P. 130, Jones Very's Essays and Poems; 205, Painting and Sculpture; Fate; 207, Woodnotes, II; 262, W. S. Landor; 373, The Park; Forebearance; Grace; 374, The Senses and the Soul; 382, Transcendentalism*; 408, The Ideal Man#.

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CHRONOLOGY

1803

May 25. Ralph Waldo Emerson born in Boston, Massachusetts.

1813-17

At the Boston Latin School.

1817

August. Enters Harvard College, "President's Freshman" of Dr. Kirkland.

1821

Is class poet, graduates, and teaches in his brother William's school, Boston.

1822

Autumn. In Boston teaching.

1825

February. At Cambridge, studying divinity.

1826

October 10. Approbated to preach by the Middlesex ministers.
October 26. Preaches his first sermon in his uncle Ripley's pulpit.
November 25. Sails for Carolina in quest of health.

1827

January-June. Preaches in Southern cities and returns to Boston.
September and October. Preaches at Northampton and New Bedford, Mass.

1828

December 6. Preaches in Concord, New Hampshire.
December 17. Becomes betrothed to Miss Ellen Tucker at Concord.

1829

March 11. Colleague of Rev. Henry Ware, Jr., Hanover Street, Boston.
September 29. Marries Miss Tucker, and settles in Chardon Place.

1830-31

Preaches constantly in Boston. Illness and death of Mrs. Emerson.

1832

June. Religious doubts, Proposes to give up the rite of communion.
September 9. Preaches a farewell sermon in Hanover Street.
December 25. Ill and sad, sails for Sicily.

1833

February-May. In Italy and France; meets Landor and Lafayette.
August. Visits Carlyle at Craigenputtock and Wordsworth at Rydal.
October 9. Reaches New York.
November 4. Lectures at Masonic Temple in Boston on Natural History.

1834

January. Still lecturing in Boston.
May 14. Begins a forty-year correspondence with Carlyle.
October 20. Retires to live in the Old Manse at Concord.

1835

January and February. Biographical lectures in Boston.
July. Buys his Concord home on the Lexington Road.
September 14. Marries Miss Lidian Jackson at Plymouth.

1836

January-May. Finishes Nature, his first book.
July. Assists in reprinting Carlyle's Sartor Resartus.
September. Helps to form Transcendental Club.
October. Birth of his son Waldo Emerson.

1837

August 31. Phi Beta Kappa oration at Cambridge.
November. First speech on American Slavery (at Concord).
December 6. Begins ten lectures on "Human Culture" at Boston.

1838

March 12. First address on War, before the Peace Society, Boston.
July 15. Gives the famous Divinity School Address at Cambridge.
December 5. Begins ten lectures on "Human Life " in Boston.

1839

January-July. Reprinting Carlyle's books and sending him money.
December 4. Begins ten lectures on "The Present Age" in Boston.

1840

January 15. Dedicates a church at Lexington
May 29. Begins correspondence with John Sterling.
July 1. Writes introduction to the Dial.
October-December. Editing the first series of Essays.

1841

January. Publication of the first Essays.
April 25. Thoreau goes to live with Emerson for two years.
August 11. Oration at Waterville College.
December 2. Begins eight lectures on "The times" at Boston.

1842

January 27. Death of his son Waldo Emerson.
October 1. Describes in the Dial Alcott's English experiences.

1843

January and February. Lectures in New York and Philadelphia.
June. Visits Alcott at Fruitlands.
July 4. Gives his first Temperance Address, at Harvard, Mass.

1844

February 7. Lectures to Merchants' clerks in Boston on "The Young American."
August 1. Gives in Concord his "Address on Emancipation."
December 20. Publishes the second Essays.

1845

July 22. Gives a discourse at Middlebury,Vt., on "The Scholar," when the college chaplain prayed against "the nonsense of Transcendentalism."
December 11. Begins seven lectures at Boston on "Representative Men."
July-December. Visits Thoreau often in his Walden cabin.

1846

October. Arranges his poems for publication in a volume.
November. Invited to England by Alexander Ireland to give lectures.

1847

January. Publishes an American and an English edition of Poems.
March 2. Invited by Carlyle to England, and to lecture in London.
October 5. Sails for England.

1848

January-February. Lectures in England and Scotland.
March-April. In London and Oxford.
May. In Paris.
June. Lectures in London.
July 15. Sails for America.

1849

July. Edits his fifth book, Nature: Addresses and Lectures.
September. Nature reprinted.
October and November. Edits Representative Men.

1850

January. Publishes Representative Men.
February. Lectures through the West.

1851

March 21. Reads his Conduct of Life in six lectures at Pittsburg.

1852

March. Gives Sunday lectures at Plymouth, Mass., in a course with Thoreau and others.
May 11. Address to Louis Kossuth at the Concord battle-ground.

1853

January 10. Lectures at Springfield, Ill.
February. Writing on English Traits.
October. The manuscript of Country Walking, joint work with Ellery Channing, prepared, but never finished.

1854

January and February. Lecturing in Philadelphia, Michigan, and Wisconsin.
March 7. Denounces Fugitive Slave Law.
August 15. Gives an address at Williams College.

1855

January 25. Gives a long anti-slavery address in Boston.
March and later. Preparing English Traits for publication.
September 20. Addresses the Women's Rights Convention, Boston.
August. Reads and praises Whitman's "Leaves of Grass."

1856

January. Publishes English Traits.
May 26. Speaks in Concord on "The Assault on Charles Sumner."
September 10. Speaks at the Kansas relief meeting in Cambridge.

1857

January and February. Lecturing in Ohio, Illinois, etc.
March. Entertains, John Brown, of Kansas, in Concord.
April. Conferring with Lowell, R. H. Dana, etc., on the Atlantic Monthly.
July 4. Writes the Ode for the town celebration in Concord.
December. Gives a new lecture, "Country Life," at Concord.

1858

March 3. Begins six philosophical lectures in Boston.
April and later. Dines monthly with the Saturday Club in Boston.
December. Lecturing in the West.

1859

January 25. Speech in Boston at the Burns Centenary.
March and April. Six lectures in Boston on "Manners and Art."
May 7. Hears John Brown in Concord Town Hall.
May 22. Lectures for Theodore Parker (absent) in Music Hall.
December 2. Takes part in funeral service for Brown, his day of death.

1860

March 8. Lecturing in Canada.
June 17. Memorial address on Theodore Parker in Boston.

1861

April and May. Six lectures in Boston - the last on "Boston."
July 10. Address to the students of Tufts College on War.
November 12. Lectures on "American Nationality" in Boston

1862

January 29. Visits Charles Sumner at Washington. Lectures there on "American Civilisation" in presence of Abraham Lincoln.
Spring and summer. Addresses Parker's congregation in Boston.
May 8. Gives the funeral eulogy of Thoreau in the Concord church.
October 12. Upholds Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation in Boston.

1863

January 1. Celebrates Emancipation with the "Boston Hymn" at Boston.
July 22. Second address at Dartmouth College.
August 11. Second address at Waterville, Me.
December 1. Lectures in the Parker Fraternity Course, Boston.

1864

April 23. Shakespeare Tercentenary at the Saturday Club:
May 23. Attends Hawthorne's funeral in the Concord church.
October 8. Visits J. M. Forbes at the island Naushon with Goldwin Smith.
November 27. Begins a course of six lectures at the Parker Fraternity on "Social Aims."

1865

January and February. Lecturing at the West.
April 19. Gives the funeral eulogy of Abraham Lincoln at Concord.
July 21. Speech at the Harvard Commemoration of Dead Graduates.
July 21. Second address at Williams College.
Autumn. Writing the poem "Terminus."

1866

April 14. Begins six lectures in Boston on "Intellect."
December. Prepares the second book of poems, May Day, for printing.

1867

January-March. Lecturing in Illinois and Wisconsin.
April 19. Dedicates the Soldier's Monument at Concord.
May 1. Publishes May Day.
May 30. Addresses the Free Religious Association at Boston.
July. Second Phi Beta Kappa oration at Cambridge.

1868

January and February. Lecturing.
September 13. Death of his brother William Emerson at Concord.
October 12. Begins six lectures at Boston.

1869

January 2. Begins ten weekly readings of poetry and prose at Boston.
March 1. Reads a sketch of Mary Moody Emerson at the New England Woman's Club.
April and May. Three discourses on "Religion" at Boston.

1870

April 16. Begins a course of sixteen weekly lectures at Harvard - "Natural History of the Intellect."
June. Publishes Society and Solitude.
December 22-23. Speeches in New York before the New England Society.

1871

February 3. Speech at the organisation of the Art Museum, Boston.
August 15. Speech on Walter Scott at Massachusetts Historical Society.
November 20. Sets out for lectures at Chicago and elsewhere.

1872

January. Lectures at Baltimore and Howard University, Washington.
April 15. Begins six readings of prose and poetry at Boston.
July. Address at Amherst College.
October 28. Sails for England with his daughter Ellen.
November 7. Visits Carlyle at Chelsea.
December 28. In Egypt, by way of Paris, Florence, and Naples.

1873

February 19. Sails from Alexandria for Messina and Naples.
April. Speaks for the last time in England at the Workingmen's College.
May. Is welcomed home by the Concord people in procession.
October 1. Address at the opening of the Concord Public Library (Charles Sumner present).
December 16. Reads the poem "Boston" at the celebration of the Tea Party of December 16, 1773.

1874

January. Edits Parnassus, a collection of poems.

1875

April 19. Speaks at the Centenary of Concord Fight.
September and October. Edits Letters and Social Aims, with the aid of Mr. Cabot.

1876

June 28. Addresses the students of Virginia at Charlottesville.
November 8. Addresses the Boston Latin School.

1877

April 20. Reads his Boston lecture at the Old South Church.

1878

March 30. Reads a lecture, "Fortune of the Republic," at the Old South.
July and August. Attends the Conversations of Mr. Alcott and Dr. Jones in Concord, preliminaries of the School of Philosophy.

1879

May 5. Second address to the students of Divinity Hall, Cambridge.
July 4. Reads the Declaration of Independence in the Concord Town Hall.
July 12. Attends the opening of the School of Philosophy.
August 2. Gives his lecture on "Memory" before the school.

1880

August 2. Lectures on "Aristocracy" before the School of Philosophy in the Town Hall.

1881

February 10. Reads a paper on Carlyle at the Massachusetts Historical Society.

1882

March 21. Attends the Centenary of the Concord Social Circle.
March 26. At Longfellow's funeral in Cambridge.
April 27. Ralph Waldo Emerson dies at Concord.

Chronological List of Lectures and Addresses

1830

Feb. 17. Right Hand of Fellowship to Rev. H. B. Goodwin, Concord, Mass. (sep. printed 1830).

1832

Sept. 9. Sermon on the Lord's Supper (xi.7).
Nov. 4. Introductory Lecture before the Boston Society of Natural History (at the Masonic Temple, Boston).
December. On the Relation of Man to the Globe.

1834

Jan. 17. Water (at the Boston Athenaeum before the Mechanic's Institute).
Italy, two lectures
May 7. The Naturalist (at the fourth annual meeting of the Boston Natural History of Society).

1835

Jan. 29. Six lectures on Biography (before the Society for Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, at Masonic Temple, Boston).
I Tests of Great Men
II Michelangelo (published North American Review, Jan. 1837)
III Martin Luther
IV Milton (North American Review, July 1838)
V George Fox
VI Edmund Burke
August. Address before the American Institution of Education On the Best Mode of Inspiring a Correct Taste in English Literature (further passages in Collected Writings, vii.186; ii.146).
Sept. 12. Historical Discourse at Concord on the Second Centennial Anniversary of the Incorporation of the Town (xi.33).
Nov. 5. Ten lectures on "English Literature" (before the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge at the Masonic Temple, Boston).
I Introduction (Nature, i.31,32,34,39,55)
II Permanent Traits of English National Genius
III The Age of Fable (History ii.36-38)
IV Chaucer
V & VI Shakespeare (Nature 1.32,33,38,57)
VII Lord Bacon
VIII Ben Jonson, Herrick, Herbert, Wotton
IX Ethical Writers
X Modern Aspects of Letters, (Nature 1.25,26)

1836

Dec. 8. The Philosophy of History (twelve lectures at the Masonic Temple, Boston).

I Introductory

II Humanity of Science

III & IV Art and Literature (Art, ii.327-329,334,337, 339), (Intellect, ii.304,305).

V Politics (Politics iii.193,196)

VI Religion (Character, x.95,96; Oversoul, ii.255,258,263,264,271; Spiritual Laws, ii.150,151; Preacher, x.210,212).

VII Society (History, ii.9; Friendship, ii.184,187; Compensation, ii.155).

VIII Trades and Professions.

IX Manners (History ii.28; Spiritual Laws, ii.148).

X Ethics.

XI The Present Age.

XII Individualism (Self-Reliance, ii.82,84; History ii.13,30,32).

1837

June 10. Address on Education at Green Street School, Providence, R. I. (Education x.128,129,130-132,134).

August 31. The American Scholar Phi Beta Kappa oration at Cambridge (i.81)

November. Slavery: an address delivered in the Second Church in Concord at the request of several gentlemen.

December 6. Ten lectures on Human Culture at Masonic Temple, Boston.

Introduction

Doctrine of the Hands

The Head

Ear and Eye (Poet, iii.9,19; History, ii.17; Art, ii.334; Beauty, vi.28 etc.)

The Heart (Lofe, ii.177; Friendship, ii.183,185, 187,197,199,202,203; vi.258)

Being and Seeming (Spiritual Laws, ii.148,149; Experience, iii.51)

Prudence (Prudence, ii.210-225; Manners,iii.124)

Heroism (MS wanting; probably printed, ii.231)

Holiness (The Preacher, x.213; Over-Soul, ii.252, 276-278)

General Views (MS wanting)

1838

March 12. War, Seventh lecture in a course before the American Peace Society at the Odeon, Boston (xi.177)

July 15. Address delivered before the Senior Class in Divinity College, Cambridge (i.117)

July 24. Literary Ethics; an oration delivered before the literary societies of Dartmouth College (i.149)

1838

Dec. 5. Ten lectures on Human Life at the Masonic Temple, Boston, beginning Dec. 5 and continuing weekly:

I The Doctrine of the Soul (Intellect ii.306; Over-Soul, ii.251,254,255,260,263,267,268,270; History, ii.12)

II Home (Education x.127,218; Passage in Domestic Life)

III School (The Times i.250; History ii.35; Spiritual Laws ii.127,236; Over-Soul ii.256,259; Education x.127,130, 132; Self-Reliance ii.64,65)

IV Love (Printed almost entire, ii.159)

V Genius (History ii.19; Self-Reliance ii.47; Intellect ii.314; The Poet iii.27

VI The Protest

VII Tragedy (Dial, iv.515)

VIII Comedy (Collected Writings viii.149)

IX Duty (Self-Reliance, ii.67,78,87; Compensation, ii.96,97,102,108,117; Spiritual Laws ii.132)

X Tendencies

1840

Jan. 15. Address to the People of East Lexington on the Dedication of their Church

1841

Jan. 25. Man the Reformer, before the Mercantile Library Association (i.215)

Aug. 11. The Method of Nature, Address at Waterville College, Me. (i.181)

Dec. 2. Eight lectures on The Times at the Masonic Temple in Boston. MSS mostly wanting. Largely printed in the Dial, and in Collected Writings.

I Introduction (i.245)

II The Conservative (i.277)

III The Poet (Poetry and Imagination, vii.7)

IV The Transcendentalist (i.309)

V Manners (iii.117)

VI Character (in part iii.87)

VII Relation to Nature

VIII Prospects

1843

Feb. 5. Lectures on "New England" in the City of New York, beginning Feb. 7 (reported in New York Weekly Tribune, Feb. 11)

I Genius of the Anglo-Saxon Race

II Trade

III Manners and Customs of New England

IV Recent Literature and Spiritual Influences

V Results (MSS only partially preserved)

July 4. Address to the Temperance Society of Harvard, Mass.

1844

Feb. 7. "The Young American"; a lecture read before the Mercantile Library Association, at Amory Hall, in Boston. (i.341)

March 10. Address at Second Church

August 1. Address on Emancipation in the British West Indies (xi.129)

1845

July 22. Discourse at Middlebury College, Vt. (mostly in x.249 and iv.249)

August 1. Remarks at a meeting in Waltham on the anniversary of the W. I. Emancipation (reported in the New York Tribune, Aug. 7)

Sept. 22. Politics (apparently remarks at a meeting in Concord concerning the annexation of Texas)

Dec. 11. Seven lectures on Representative Men before the Boston Lyceum at the Odeon. (iv)

1847

Feb. 10. Eloquence - before the Mercantile Library Association, Tremont Temple, Boston. Reported in Boston Journal, Feb. 12 (vii.61)

May 8. Discourse at Nantucket Worship (read "I suppose for the last time a Sunday discourse from the pulpit)

November. Books or a course of Reading. The Superlative. At Manchester, England.

1848

February. Natural Aristocracy. At Edinburgh (x.33)

June 7. Mind and Manners of the Nineteenth Century (so reported in Douglas Jerrold's newspaper. The title on the covers of the first three lectures is The Natural History of the Intellect.

I Powers and Laws of Thought
II Relation of Intellect to Natural Science
III Tendencies and Duties of Men of Thought
IV Politics and Socialism
(fourth lecture of course on "Present Age" 1839-40)
V Poetry and Eloquence (a Boston lecture of 1847)
VI Natural Aristocracy (the Edinburgh lecture)

June. (at Exeter Hall) Napoleon, Shakespeare, Domestic Life (first two from Representative Men, 1845; the third perhaps "Home", 1838)

Dec. 27. England (before the Mercantile Library Association at Tremont Temple, Boston. Mostly in English Traits)

1851

March 21. Six lectures on the "Conduct of Life" at Pittsburgh, Pa. (vol. vi. of Collected Writings)

May 3. Address to the Citizens of Concord. Sunday Evening. (Fugitive Slave Law)

1852

May 11. Address to Kossuth (xi.357)

1853

Jan. 10. Anglo-Saxon at Springfield, Ill. (substantially in English Traits)

Feb. 27? Anglo-American at Philadelphia (xi.393)

1854

Jan. 3. Six lectures in Philadelphia; following new:

I Norsemen and English Influence in Modern Civilization (MSS fragmentary; probably in great part in "English Traits")

III Poetry and English Poetry (substantially in Poetry and Imagination. viii.7)

V France or Urbanity

March 7. The Seventh of March. Lecture read at the Tabernacle, New York City (xi.203)

August 15. Address to the Adelphic Union of Williamstown College

1855

Jan. 25. Lecture on Slavery in the course by various persons at the Tremont Temple, Boston. (reported in Boston Traveller, January 26)

March. Beauty and Manners. At Concord (Mass.)

Sept. 20. Address at the Woman's Rights Convention (Boston xi.335)

Sept. 29. Address to the Inhabitants of Concord at the Consecration of Sleeply Hollow (essay on Immortality viii.305)

1856

May 26. The Assault upon Mr. Sumner (xi.231)

Sept. 10. Speech at the Kansas Relief Meeting in Cambridge (xi.239)

1857

January. Works and Days. At Cincinnati (vii.149)

April. Memory. At Concord Lyceum

July 4. Ode in the Town Hall, Concord (ix.173)

December. Country Life at Concord Lyceum

1858

March 3. Six lectures on the "Natural Method of Mental Philosophy" at Freeman Place Chapel, Boston

I Country Life (abstract included in the Concord Lecture, 1857)

II Works and Days (probably the Cincinnati lecture, January, 1857)

III Powers of the Mind

IV Natural Method of Mental Philosophy

V Memory

VI Self-Possession

Sept. 29. The Man with the Hoe

Dec. 14. Success at Hartford, Conn. (vii.265)

1859

Jan. 25. Speech at the celebration of the Burns Centenary (xi.363)
March 23. Six lectures at the Freeman Place Chapel, Boston
I The Law of Success
II Originality (viii.167)
III Clubs (vii.211)
IV Art and Criticism
V Manners (Behaviour vi.171)
VI Morals (Character and Sovereignty of Ethics, x.91 and 175)
May 22. The Superlative or Mental Temperance, at Music Hall, Boston (x.157)
October 2. Beauty in Art. At Music Hall
Nov. 8. Courage (vii.237)
Nov. 13. Domestic Life. At Music Hall (vii.99)
Nov. 18. Remarks at a meeting for the relief of the family of John Brown, at Tremont Temple, Boston (xi.249)
Dec. 25. Conversation. At Music Hall, Boston.

1860

Jan. 6. John Brown. Speech at Salem (xi.257)
March. Poetry and Criticism at Montreal
March 18. Moral Sense at the Music Hall, Boston
June 17. Theodore Parker. Address at the Memorial Meeting at the Music Hall, Boston (xi.265)
Nov. 3. Reform before Mr. Parker's congregation at the Music Hall, Boston
Nov. 20. Classes of Men. At the Music Hall on Sunday.

1861

Jan. 6. Cause and Effect. At Music Hall before Theodore Parker's congregation
Jan. 24. Attempted speech at the annual meeting of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, Tremont Temple, Boston. (See report in the Liberator, Feb. 1)
Feb. 3. Natural Religion, Sunday Discourse to Mr. Parker's congregation at the Music Hall
April 9. Six lectures on"Life and Literature"at the Meionaon, Boston.
I Genius and Temperament
II Art
III Civilization at a Pinch
IV Some Good Books
V Poetry and Criticism in England and America
VI Boston
July 10. Address at Tuft's College (Somerville, Mass.)
Sept. 27. Address at Yarmouth, Mass., on Education (mostly in Education x.123
Nov. 12. American Nationality. In the Fraternity course, at the Music Hall, Boston (Boston Evening Transcript, Nov. 13)
- Truth (before Mr. Parker's congregation at Music Hall?)
Dec. 29. Immortality. In the Parker Fraternity course at the Music Hall (viii.305)

1862

Jan. 31. American Civilization. At the Smithsonian Institution, Washington (vii.21 and xi.275)

March 16. Essential Principles of Religion; on Sunday before Mr. Parker's congregation at the Music Hall (mostly in Character and Sovereignty of Ethics, x.91 and 175)

April 13. Moral Forces. At the Music Hall before the 28th Congregational Society on a Fast Day appointed by the President of the United States

June 29. Thoreau at the Music Hall on Sunday (MSS fragmentary; probably used in the Biographical Sketch prefixed to Thoreau's Excursions, 1863)

Oct. 12. The Emancipation Proclamation (xi.291)

Nov. 18. Perpetual Forces. Fraternity lecture at Tremont Temple (x.69)

Dec. 14. Health

1863

Jan. 1. Boston Hymn. At the Music Hall (ix.174)

July 22. Discourse before the Literary Societies of Dartmouth College. Repeated August 11 at Waterville College (x.229)

Dec. 1. The Fortune of the Republic in the Parker Fraternity course, Boston (xi.393 with some additions)

1864

Aug. 9. Discourse before the Literary Societies of Middlebury College, Vt.

Nov. 27. Six weekly lectures before the Parker Fraternity at the Melodeon in Boston

I Education
II Social Aims (viii.77)
III Resources (viii.131)
IV Table-Talk (mostly in Social Aims and in Clubs)
V Books
VI Character (x.91)

1865

April 19. Abraham Lincoln, Remarks at the funeral services in Concord (xi.305)

July 21. Harvard Commemoration Speech (xi.317)

July 31. Address before the Adelphi Union, Williams College, Williamstown: compiled from lectures on Art and Criticism; Books; Some Good Books; Success.

1866

April 14. Six lectures on the Philosophy of the People at Chickering's Hall, Boston

I Seven Metres of Intellect
II Instinct, Perception, Talent
III Genius, Imagination, Taste
IV Laws of Mind
V Conduct of the Intellect
VI Relation of the Intellect to Morals

Dec. 11. Man of the World. Before the Parker Fraternity

1867

March 4. Eloquence at Chicago (viii.107)

April 14. Remarks at the funeral of George L. Stearns at Medford, Massachusetts (reported in Commonwealth, April 27)

April 19. Address at the dedication of the Soldiers' monument, Concord, Mass. (xi.99)

May 12. Rule of Life. At the Horticultural Hall before the Radical Association (mostly in Sovereignty of Ethics, x.175, and Preacher, x.207

May 30. Remarks at the Organization of the Free Religious Association at Horticultural Hall, Boston (xi.379)

Aug. 21. Speech at the dinner in Boston, to the Chinese Embassy (reported in Boston Daily Advertiser, August 27)

Sept. 16. The Preacher. At a meeting at Rev. J. T. Sargent's (x.207)

1868

Oct. 12. Six lectures at the Meionaon, Boston:

IV Leasts and Mosts (lecture for which Civilization at a Pinch was substituted, April, 1861)

V Hospitality, Homes

VI Greatness (viii.283 in part)

1869

Jan. 2. Readings of English Poetry and Prose at Chickering's Hall, Boston on ten Saturday afternoons

I Chivalry

II Chaucer

III (wanting)

IV Shakespeare

V Ben Jonson and Lord Bacon

VI Herrick, Donne, Herbert, Vaughan, Marvell

VII Milton

VIII (wanting)

IX Johnson, Gibbon, Burke, Cowper, Wordsworth

X (wanting)

March 1. Mary Moody Emerson, before the Woman's Club, in Boston (x.371)

April 4. Natural Religion at Horticultural Hall, Boston. (Mostly in Sovereignty of Ethics x.175)

May 17. A reading on "Religion" at Rev. J. T. Sargent's

May 28. Speech at the Second annual meeting of the Free Religious Association, Tremont Temple, Boston (xi.385)

Sept. 14. Speech at evening reception on the centennial anniversary of Alex von Humboldt's birth (publication of proceedings by Boston Society of Natural History, 1870, p. 71)

1870

April 26. Sixteen university lectures at Harvard College on the Natural History of the Intellect.

I Introduction; Praise of Knowledge

II Transcendency of Physics

III, IV Perception

V, VI Memory
VII Imagination
VIII Inspiration
IX Genius
X Common Sense
XI Identity
XII, XIII Metres of Mind
XIV Platonists
XV Conduct of Intellect
XVI Relation of Intellect to Morals (repeated in 1871, in a slightly different order, omitting XI, XIV, and adding Wit and Humor, Demonaology, and another lecture on the Conduct of Intellect. In substance these lectures are mostly the same with the first three in the course on "Mind and Manners in the XIX Century" (1848) and with some of those on the "Natural Method of Mental Philosophy (1858), and "Philosophy for the People" (1866). Most of what was new is given in "Poetry and Imagination". Collected Writings viii.7)

Dec. 22. Speech before the New England Society, at Delmonico's New York (printed in the Proceedings of the Society)

Dec. 23. Discourse on the Anniversary of the Landing of the Pilgrims at Plymouth. Before the New England Society, at Steinway Hall, New York. (reported in the New York Tribune, Dec. 24, and Boston Daily Advertiser, Dec. 26)

1871

Feb. 3. Speech at the meeting for organizing the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. (reported in Boston Daily Advertiser, Feb. 4)

Aug. 15. Walter Scott, at Massachusetts Historical Society, on the centennial anniversary of Scott's birth (xi.370)

1872

Jan. 4. Inspiration: one of a course of four lectures at Peabody Institute, Baltimore (viii.255)

Jan. 7. Books and Reading. At Howard University, Washington. (reported in Boston Evening Transcript, Jan. 22)

April 15. Six readings at Mechanics Hall, Boston.
I Books (Read Thoreau's Inspiration, H. Hunt's Thought)
II Poetry and Imagination (as printed in viii.7) as far through as Creation, readings from Wordsworth, Byron, Lewis, Scott, ballads
III Poetry and Imagination, concluded. Read Taliessin Dinas Emlinn Saadi from Zestösliche Dwan Arab ballad fromO.D.
IV Criticism: Klephtic ballads, (Lochinvar; Timrod's poem 'Boy of Egremont.')
V Culture. Read Goethe, Pascal, Pope, Bolingbroke, Leonardo da Vinci, Varnhagen vone Ense
VI Morals, Religion

Aug. 2. Speech at the dinner in Boston to the Japanese envoys. (reported in Commonwealth, August 10)

Oct. 15. Speech at dinner for Mr. J. A. Fronde at New York. (reported in New York Tribune Oct. 16)

1873

Oct. 1. Address at the opening of the Monroe Public Library, Concord, Mass.

Dec. 16. Read in Faneuil Hall the poem "Boston". (ix. 182)

1875

Apr. 19. Address at the unveiling of the statue of the Minute Man at Concord Bridge (reported in Commonwealth Apr. 24)

1876

June 28. Oration to the Senior Class of the University of Virginia (x.247)

Nov. 8. Speech at the meeting of the Latin School Association in Boston on the centennial anniversary of the reopening of the school after the evacuation of the town by the British troops (reported in Boston Evening Transcript, Nov. 9)

1877

April 20. Boston. At Old South Church, Boston (from course on Life and Literature in 1861, with some additions)

1878

March 30. The Fortune of the Republic, at Old South Church, Boston. (A lecture of 1863, with additions. Published xi.393)

1879

May 5. The Preacher. At Divinity School Chapel, Cambridge. (The lecture of Sept. 16, 1867, Publ. x.207)

1881

Feb. 10. Carlyle. At Massachusetts Historical Society (Published,x.453)

Works Published in His Lifetime

Nature. Boston, 1836.

Carlyle's Sartor Resartus, edited in conjunction with Le Baron Russell. Introduction by Emerson. Boston, 1838

Michael Angelo. North American Review, 1837

Milton. North American Review, 1838

Letter to President Van Buren (concerning certain wrongs of the Cherokee Indians)

"National Intelligences." Washington, 1838.

Carlyle's Critical and Miscellaneous Essays (edited), Boston, 1838

The Dial. Boston, 1840-1844. See elsewhere.

Essays. First Series (12). Boston, 1841. (Preface by Carlyle, London, 1841)

Obituary Notice of Ezra Ripley, D.D. "Concord Republican", October 1, 1841

Carlyle's Past and Present (edited), Boston, 1843.

Essays. Second Series (9), Boston, 1844.

Address delivered in Concord, August 1, 1844 on the anniversary of the Emancipation of Negroes in the British West Indies. Boston, 1844 (reprinted in The Dial, Cincinnati, November and December, 1860)

Editor's Address - To the Public. First number of the Massachusetts "Quarterly Review", 1847

Poems. Boston, 1847

War. Miss Peabody's Aesthetic Papers, Boston, 1849

Nature. Addresses and Lectures, Boston, 1849

Representative Men. Boston, 1850 (translated into Danish by Thorson, and published at Copenhagen, 1857)

Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli (chapters on Margaret in Concord and In Boston) Boston, 1852.

English Traits. Boston, 1856 (Translated by Spielhagen, Hanover, 1857)

Samuel Hoar, "Putnam's Magazine." December, 1856.

The Chartist's Complaint (poem), Atlantic Monthly, Nov. 1857

The Rommany Girl, "Atlantic Monthly", 1858. In the same year and magazine, the poems, "Days, Brahma, Two Rivers, Walden Samkeit"and essays on Illusions, Solitude and Society, Books, Persian Poetry, and Eloquence.

The Sacred Dance. From the Persian. Printed in "The Dial", Cincinnati, January, 1860.

Quatrains (12), Cincinnati, The Dial, February and March, 1860

Domestic Life. Printed in "The Dial", Cincinnati, October, 1860

Speeches concerning John Brown (at Boston, Nov. 18, 1859; at Concord, Dec. 2; at Salem, Jan. 6, 1860). Echoes of Harper's Ferry, 1860.

Culture. "Atlantic Monthly", 1860. Also the Song of Nature.

Conduct of Life. Boston, 1860.

The Test (poem) "Atlantic Monthly", January, 1861.

American Civilization. "Atlantic Monthly", April, 1861.

Old Age. "Atlantic Monthly", August, 1862. (Preface to Thoreau's Excursions edited by Emerson, 1866)

The President's Proclamation. "Atlantic Monthly", Nov., 1862

The Boston Hymn. Readin Boston Music Hall, New Year's Day, 1862. "Atlantic Monthly", 1863.

Voluntaries, "Atlantic Monthly", 1863

Saadi. "Atlantic Monthly", 1864.

Guilstan or Rose Garden of Saadi (Gladwin's translation edited by Emerson with preliminary essay on Persian Poetry, Boston, 1865.

Remarks at the funeral services of the President (Lincoln) at Concord, April 19, 1865. Boston: Living Age, May 13, 1865.

Thoreau's Letters (edited), Boston, 1865

My Garden. "Atlantic Monthly", 1866

Character. North American Review, 1866.

Terminus. Atlantic Monthly, 1867.

Aspects of Culture. Phi Beta Kappa address at Harvard University, 1867. Atlantic Monthly, January, 1868

May Day and other pieces. Boston, 1867.

Society and Solitude. Boston, 1870. (Haarlem, translated into Dutch by August Pease)

Introduction to Goodwin's edition of Plutarch's "Morals", Boston, 1870

Preface to W. E. Channing's poem "The Wanderer", Boston, 1871.

Select Poems. Boston, 1876 (containing several not in previous volumes)

Letters and Social Aims. Boston, 1876.

Parnassus. A volume of choice poems selected from the whole range of English literature by Emerson, with a prefatory essay, Boston, 1874.

Demonology. North American Review. 1877.

Perpetual Forces. North American Review, 1877.

The Sovereignty of Ethics. North American Review, 1878.

The Preacher. Unitarian Review, 1879.

Preface to One Hundred Greatest Men, London, 1879.

Paper on Carlyle read before the Massachusetts Historical Society, Scribner's Magazine, 1881.

Superlatives. The Century, February, 1882.

The Writer's Biography

I, Doris Holmes, was born in Marshfield Hills, Massachusetts, on March 1, 1906. My parents, likewise of Massachusetts, are Frederick A. Holmes and Alice S. Holmes. I was educated at Derby Academy in Hingham, Thayer Academy in Braintree, and at Boston University College of Liberal Arts. I received my degree of Bachelor of Arts from Boston University in June, 1927. I then entered the Graduate School. I received the degree of Master of Arts in English in June, 1929. Since that time I have been at work on my doctorate, which I hope to complete in June, 1932. During the years of my graduate study I have acted as assistant in the English department at the College of Liberal Arts, and during the year 1931-1932 I have also served in the capacity of Instructor in English at Boston University College of Music and am to be retained, I understand, as Instructor in English during the coming academic year of 1932-1933.

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